A Hopeless Case



Edgar Fawcett

fornia
nal
y

C. H. SANFORD.

Sanford 1881

A HOPELESS CASE

BY

EDGAR FAWCETT



BOSTON
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1880

Copyright, 1880,
By EDGAR FAWCETT.

RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY
H. O. HOUGHTON AND COMPANY.



A HOPELESS CASE.

I.

THE American spirit, as it is called, has a contempt for time's hallowing influences. Indeed, it seems to believe that time cannot hallow, but can only destroy. Not many years ago Lafayette Place was one of the most imposing patrician quarters of New York. The clamors of Broadway came to it only in a dreamy murmur. Its length was not great, but it had a lordly breadth. Within easiest access of the most busy purlieus, its quietude was proverbial. So infrequent were vehicles along its pave ments, that in summer the grass would often

2061656

crop out there like fringy scrollwork, near the well-swept sidewalks and cleanly gutters. At one end, where this stately avenue is crossed by a narrower street, rose an immense granite church, in rigid classical style, with the pointed roof of an ancient temple, and immense gray fluted pillars forming its portico. This church is still standing, but near it looms a monstrous brick building that one glance can tell us is a third-rate caravansary of a boarding-house, where people with characters as dingy as the window-panes may, perhaps, gain facile admission. The boarding-house was once a fine private mansion, and has been enlarged into its present dreary bigness. Then, at this southern end, stood, until a very short time ago, the gray old grandeur of St. Bartholomew's, where, for nearly half a century, the blooming brides of our "best families" were married, and their fathers and mothers lay in funeral state as the years rolled on. At the northern end was

once a spacious dwelling-house, whose oaken hall, with its richly mediæval carvings and brilliant window of stained glass, might well have served for some antique abbey oversea. But this delightful old house has disappeared, and a vast brick structure, which is one of those towering altars that we so often build to commerce, has sprung up in its stead. There was also a certain edifice closely adjacent to this, which had a *porte cochère*, in the real Parisian style, and supplied a delightful touch of foreign novelty. But that, too, has disappeared; like the house with the charming cloisteral hall, its very quaintness was its ruin. If our New York buildings cannot always have the supreme advantage of representing trade, they are at least diligent in their devotion to ugliness.

But Lafayette Place is somehow Lafayette Place still. Its transformation into cheap lodgments is gradual, though sure. The siege goes steadily on, but the besieged has not yet suc-

cumbed. Every year the handsome family-carriages that roll up and down its avenue grow fewer and fewer; every year its pavements, worn by the feet of dead and gone Knickerbockers, are more frequented by shabby Germans or slatternly Irish. But the solid solemnity of the Astor Library still draws scholars and bookworms within its precinct, though the dignity of possessing the Columbia Law School, into which slim, bright-faced collegians would once troop of a morning, has now departed forever. And a few abodes are still to be found here, with the burnished door-plates and the glimpses of rich inner tapestries that point toward wealthful prosperity.

In one of these houses there lived, not long ago, a certain elderly widow and her brother. The lady's name was Mrs. Russell Leroy, and she was fond of always retaining this courtesy-title, though death had deprived her of legal right to it. Her late husband had held much social distinction; they had often traveled

abroad together, when traveling abroad was a rarer American luxury than it is to-day, and they had been famed for their transatlantic sympathies and their tendency to underrate most native commodities, at a time when such dainty depreciation had by no means come widely into vogue. They had thrown open a palatial house to throngs of guests, but always with so circumspect an avoidance of forming "undesirable" connections, that the feet which crossed their threshold had been held exceptionally favored. The late Mr. Russell Leroy had acquired the reputation of being a prodigious snob; but he incorrigibly gloried in this distinction, and only went on "sifting" till the period of his death with more and more strenuous vigilance. His loss had been an immense blow to Mrs. Leroy. She was a slim lady, of elegant figure, excessively blonde, with cold, firm features, and pale gray eyes, whose lids had a haughty droop. She was not handsome, but she never came nearer being so than when

draped in her mourning robes, which she carried with an air of having sustained some specially important bereavement that no persons of the proper sort could underestimate. A few months after her widowhood, she went to live with her bachelor brother, Mr. Rivington Van Corlear, at the old family mansion in Lafayette Place. She was now about five-and-forty years of age, and her brother was about three years her senior. Rivington Van Corlear had been a society beau in his day, and his liberal inherited income had perhaps helped to make him a very successful one. He had grown stout of late years, and inseparably attached to a select club, of which he was a prominent member. He had a magnificent presence, his recent acquirement of flesh not at all marring the fine harmony of breadth and height that gave his form a princely grandeur. He wore a heavy iron-gray moustache, and his hair was almost white about the temples. He was really a superb-looking fellow; you could

easily fancy him blazing with decorations at some foreign court. But when he opened his lips the illusion ended. He spoke with a mellow, pleasant intonation, almost English enough to deceive an unpracticed ear into believing him an Englishman. But he talked little else than current gossip, always having the latest scandal at his tongue's end, and being an infallible authority on just how matters had gone off at the last fashionable polo-game or pigeon-match. It is probable that he had not read ten books through in as many years, and that those were only novels of the lightest texture. He was a wonderfully adroit card-player, and often played far into the night at his club. He had a great many friends, as the phrase goes, and these vied with each other in singing his praises. It was the fashion to consider him a model gentleman, a man of flawless honor and supreme respectability. They had made him one of their club-governors, and had kept on reëlecting him year

after year to the position, with flattering pertinacity. He was eulogized more than he knew; when he crossed the soft-carpeted club floors, looking a picture of stately ease, groups of admirers would whisper: "There goes a splendid fellow"—"He 's one of the good old stock"—"A remnant of the old Knickerbocker days."

Beyond doubt Mrs. Leroy had taken her brother's measure a good many years ago. She was far too clever a woman not to have at least reached some covert state of conviction that Rivington was one of the most successful fools who ever put on false colors before a credulous community. But then he enjoyed the priceless advantage of being, like herself, a Van Corlear; that alone gave him a kind of brevet rank far above the commoner representatives of his species. She had always swayed him without difficulty in the days when they had lived at home together, before their parents' decease and her own marriage, and she

held the leading place, now, in their present household arrangements. She never considered his advice worth asking for, though she often had the tact to seem as if she were desiring it. Rivington fancied his influence over her to be quite a noteworthy force, which was only another proof of how neatly she had learned to rule him. There is no such complete captivity as that which believes itself freedom.

Mrs. Leroy had recently held with her brother a discussion much more serious than any which usually took place between them, and here Rivington had been troubled by no doubts regarding the value of his counsel.

They were seated at dessert together; the servants had retired, and in the midst of the large oak-paneled dining-room gleamed a table richly loaded with crystal wine-flasks, filigreed silver, and vari-colored fruits. Rivington was in full evening dress, as he invariably dined, and looked majestically handsome. Mrs.

Leroy sat, dark-robed, at the other end of the table, the light from the chandelier lending her delicate face a youth of which sunshine might have robbed it, and stealing an occasional flicker from the yellowish tresses coiled about her small, graceful head. There had been a little silence between them, as often happened; but now that they were quite alone, Mrs. Leroy tranquilly said: —

"That letter from those Wolverton people, Rivington, has worried me a good deal."

"Yes, yes," said Rivington stroking his moustache. "I've thought over it all day." (He had not thought of it once that day; he had spent the morning at his Wall Street broker's and the afternoon at whist.) "Our cousin, Agnes Wolverton, requests our protection. I suppose we ought to give it. Her parents are both dead, and the father's relatives, with whom she has always lived, are going to migrate somewhere into the West; that was about what she wrote you, was it not?"

continued Rivington, recapitulating. "How old did we make her out to be, Augusta?"

"Eighteen, Rivington. Her letter has greatly prepossessed me in her favor. There is no reason why we should not offer her a home — for a little time, at least. She has some slight fortune of her own, which will prevent her from having any awkward feeling of dependence."

"So she wants to come and live with us?" said Rivington, musingly. "Well, I suppose there is no objection. Let the girl come."

"I agree with you," replied Mrs. Leroy. She had already made up her mind that Agnes Wolverton should come to Lafayette Place. Her mother had made a frightful marriage, and had drifted away from her own people — Mrs. Leroy's near kindred — in consequence of such a rank misdemeanor. But this Agnes had the Van Corlear blood in her veins, and Mrs. Leroy devoutly respected the Van Corlear blood, even when in a state of plebeian di-

lution. Her feelings toward her young cousin took the form of an actual conscientious yearning.

"I am very glad that you advise me to offer her a home here," she now said. And Rivington's white hand again wandered toward his gray moustache, with a pleased sense that its owner had finally settled the whole affair.

"She has been living in Brooklyn, I think you said, Augusta."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Leroy.

The brother and sister exchanged a significant glance across their sumptuous dessert-table. Brooklyn was a sort of Kamschatka to both of them. They admitted its existence, as a remote portion of the globe inhabited by obscure nobodies. There were a few families "whom one knew" that had eccentrically chosen Brooklyn Heights as their place of residence; but the rest of the great city merely held thousands of inferior beings that were of no earthly consequence in the general scheme of things.

"We may find her terrible style, and all that," gently resumed Mrs. Leroy; "but at her susceptible age a little training will do wonders."

"We shall have to bring her out," said Rivington Van Corlear.

Mrs. Leroy's placid eyes glanced down at her own mourning garments. She had been seven years a widow. Of course the wound had healed; it was now only a decorous memorial scar. She could still wear dark colors, — they became her blonde type so admirably.

"Yes," she said, after a little silence, during which her brother remained on the alert for her acquiescent response, "we shall have to bring her out, Rivington."

About a fortnight later Miss Agnes Wolverton made her appearance in Lafayette Place. It was now the latter portion of November. Mrs. Leroy had called upon her Brooklyn kinswoman; but on the special day of her visit Miss Wolverton had not been at

home. Afterward several letters were exchanged between the two ladies, and at length a certain day had arrived when Mrs. Leroy's guest had made her appearance.

Agnes Wolverton was a girl of medium stature, with a fresh, frank face, light-blue eyes, and black, slightly-waved hair. Mrs. Leroy at once pronounced her pretty. The arrival took place at about five o'clock in the afternoon. Rivington was making his evening toilette at the time, but he entered the drawing-room a little later, and found his sister and Agnes awaiting him there.

Rivington at once looked at his sister, after the needful introduction had taken place, and at once decided that Mrs. Leroy was laboring under some sort of unpleasant surprise.

"She has been disappointed," mentally concluded Rivington; and then, under cover of the most blameless courtesy, he made a very searching examination of the new-comer.

"You have mostly lived in Brooklyn," he said to Agnes.

"She has always lived in Brooklyn," broke in Mrs. Leroy.

"I have only been in New York three times before now," said Agnes. Her manner and accent had a decisive repose; but it was neither the manner nor the accent to which Rivington Van Corlear had somehow been accustomed.

They presently went in to dinner. Rivington offered his arm to Agnes with an exquisite grace. She accepted it with a sort of stiff astonishment. "Tell us about Brooklyn," said Mrs. Leroy's brother, socially, when they were seated.

Agnes laughed. She showed white, perfect teeth in doing so, and her laugh was sweetly musical. "What shall I tell?" she asked.

"My brother means the society there," explained Mrs. Leroy, in sweet tones.

"Yes," said Rivington, "the society. How do the people amuse themselves? Do they have balls, parties, receptions, kettle-drums, and all that?"

Agnes was silent for a moment. "They have evening entertainments," she presently said, with a demure touch in her voice. "But I have never been to many of them. I am not fond of going. And then I was not invited to many," she added, with calm candor. "We lived so quietly."

"We are going to cultivate your taste for gayety," said Rivington. "At least my sister is."

"I have no taste for gayety," returned Agnes, with a direct glance at Mrs. Leroy.

"Oh, wait till you have seen a little," laughed Rivington.

A softly distressed look overspread Agnes's face. "Does gayety mean balls and parties?" she asked.

Rivington laughed. "It means having a fine time," he said, — "seeing the best sort of people, and what is going on in the world."

"I want to see the best sort of people," said Agnes. "That was one of my great reasons for wishing to live in New York."

The words had a peculiar, puzzled ring. Agnes had lowered her eyes as she spoke them. Mrs. Leroy let an unconscious smile edge her clear-cut lips. She had made her cousin's coming a reason for the abandonment of anything like pronounced mourning attire. She wore a gown of dull black silk that was trimmed in some intricate, glittering way with a commingleMent of rare black lace and jet; she was dressed with irreproachable taste; and it struck her that Agnes Wolverton was dressed with no taste whatever. Not that the young lady had a gleam of coarseness in her sombre, inconspicuous attire; but then, as Mrs. Leroy had some time ago quite rapidly and inflexibly decided, everything that her new *protégée* wore wanted radical alteration. "The best sort of people," according to Mrs. Leroy's views, must never be approached under these infelicitous conditions of costume.

"We will do all that we can to gratify your wish, my dear," she gently answered. "I have

been in mourning for several years, as I told you; I have not gone about at all. But I mean to make a little sacrifice" (here Mrs. Leroy suppressed a soft sigh) "and take you everywhere. But we will speak of this hereafter, my dear Agnes. It is needless to hurry matters."

At the conclusion of dinner, Rivington and his sister found an opportunity of exchanging a few private words together.

"What do you think of her?" asked Mrs. Leroy.

"She has a rather pleasant face," said Rivington, as he lit his cigarette; "but oh! by Jove, she 's frightfully slow."

"That is not to be wondered at," said his sister. "Wait till I transform her."

"Is she going to stand transformation, Augusta?"

Mrs. Leroy turned quickly, so that the firelight near by sent a rich flash from the dark splendors of her raiment. "Stand it, Riv-

ington?" she murmured. "Why, what an absurd idea!"

A little later Mrs. Leroy went to her cousin's chamber. She found Agnes engaged in unpacking her trunks.

"My dear," she said, amiably, "I will ring for my maid to help you. Indeed, you need not trouble youself at all with those trunks. Françoise will put everything in order for you."

Agnes shook her head, with a polite negative smile. "Oh, thank you, cousin Augusta," she said, "but I prefer to do my own unpacking. I am accustomed to do things for myself; I have been brought up to it."

Mrs. Leroy did not ring. She seated herself at Agnes's side, and watched her in silence for several minutes.

"You have a number of books, I see," she presently said. "Are you a great reader?"

Agnes gave a surprised start. "I try to read most of the good books," she said. "Do not you?"

"Good books?" laughed Mrs. Leroy. "Well, I can't say that I am devoted to religious reading."

Agnes creased her broad forehead rather bewilderedly. "Oh, you misunderstand me," she said. "I mean the best books that come out, — those with thought and usefulness in them."

Mrs. Leroy gave a slight cough. "I am not a great reader," she said. "Indeed, I am afraid that I read very little."

Agnes, who had risen from her stooping posture before the trunk to place some volumes upon the table, now turned her frank, direct eyes full upon the speaker.

"How, then, do you manage to get on with those people of whom cousin Rivington spoke?"

"What people, my dear?"

"The best sort of people, as he calls them."

Mrs. Leroy gave a high, careless laugh. "My dear," she exclaimed, "they don't talk

about books. They have n't time ; they are too busy enjoying themselves."

Agnes had set her volumes upon the table. She walked toward the half-emptied trunk again, and knelt down beside it. She looked extremely thoughtful, and the fixity of her gaze had an immense seriousness. "How do they enjoy themselves ?" she asked.

"Oh, in a hundred ways," answered Mrs. Leroy, with a little shrug of the shoulders. "It depends upon the season, my dear, of course. Just now they are dining out and going to the opera a great deal. In a week or two the parties will begin ; there they dance a great deal. I suppose you have learned to dance ?"

Agnes looked more serious than before, and a little paler. "No, I never dance," she said. "I have no love for it."

"But you must learn, my dear, of course," said Mrs. Leroy, with a positive alarm in her tones. "You will find that all the girls of

your own age dance; they could not go out unless they did."

"Then I will not go out."

Mrs. Leroy rose in consternation. "You can't mean that!" she exclaimed. "I have made all my preparations for bringing you into society this winter; I have told my friends about you, and these, and many more, will send you invitations. As for dancing, you will find it quite easy after a few private lessons."

By this time Agnes had again risen from her kneeling posture. She went up to her cousin and laid one hand with weightless delicacy upon Mrs. Leroy's arm. The elder lady had a very close view of her companion's face; there are certain flowers whose charms are never seen until we hold them quite near; it seemed to Mrs. Leroy that the nearer she got to Agnes Wolverton the better she saw how much ebon lustre and pliant ripple lay in her dark hair, what a rare little dimple softly

indented her round chin, and how her light-blue eyes had the limpidness of crystals under their curved lashes, black as night.

"Cousin Augusta," said Agnes, with low emphasis, "I have no desire to displease you. You have allowed me to come and live here, and it is of course necessary that after such a kindness on your part we should live on perfectly agreeable terms." And now the young girl smiled; it was a smile as sweet as sunlight breaking upon a pink rose. "You shall not find me hard to get along with," she added, "if I am managed properly."

"I mean to manage you very properly," said Mrs. Leroy, kissing her on the forehead.

That evening Rivington returned from the club considerably earlier than usual; it was not one of his grand whist-nights. He found his sister sitting alone before a silvered grate, in which variant flames were writhing about one big dark block of coal, as though they were agonized serpents and it had fallen upon them.

"Has anybody been here?" asked Rivington, hiding a yawn as he sat down. He had had on a yellow cloth overcoat dotted with immense pearl buttons, as he entered the room, but this and a collapsed *chapeau bras* he had flung upon a chair just before seating himself.

"Yes," said Mrs. Leroy, looking round at her brother. She was shading her face from the fire with a large fan that was a blaze of Japanese color. "Cousin Livvy Maxwell has been here. He came to see Agnes; it was so sweet of him; you know how people pelt him with invitations. He came round from a great dinner at the Rutger Van Rensselaers', and then he went to a dance afterward."

"Well," said Rivington, "how did they get along?"

"Oh, I did n't think of letting him see Agnes," said Mrs. Leroy. "Why, Rivington, the girl has n't a decent rag to appear in."

"That 's putting it strong."

"And then" . . . suddenly began Mrs. Leroy. But here she paused. She was staring at a figure on the Japanese fan, a gorgeous lady with minute eyes and globular hair-pins, as though it had roused her special ire.

"Well," said Rivington, "and then?" . . .

Mrs. Leroy rose abruptly, and began to pace up and down the room. She had knotted her hands together very tightly; they sparkled with diamonds that the coming of Agnes had drawn from seven years of entombment in her soft-lined jewel-casket.

"Upon my word, Rivington," she broke forth, excitedly, "I think that we have made a dreadful mistake. We should never have asked that girl here until we knew all about her. I'm sorry enough to say it of one whose mother was a Van Corlear, but she is not of our class. We shall be obliged to blush for her."

"I should n't know how if I tried," said Rivington, with a grim little laugh. "My blush-

ing-works are out of order. Upon my word, Augusta," he went on, "I think you're too severe. Give the girl a chance. She behaved very respectably at dinner; I thought her slow, that was all; she did n't seem to have any snap, nor the least bit of style. But I did n't see that she threatened to disgrace us."

Mrs. Leroy had paused beside a mosaic table, where burned a faïence lamp whose light fell upon her face through a shade of tender rose-color; but even this happy glow could not mellow the pained austerity of her look.

"The girl is not of our world, Rivington," said his sister. "She has made a mistake as much as we have made one. Heaven only knows what she expected to find us — a set of prigs and blue-stockings, I am beginning to fancy. You do her an injustice when you speak slightingly of her. She's a very nice girl, in her way. Only it is not our way. It has come over me since dinner that we can never do anything with her."

"Oh, pshaw, Augusta," said Rivington, who wanted to smoke, and was searching the velvet-draped mantel for a certain bronze match-safe, "what have you discovered?"

"I can't explain it, Rivington; it's a sort of atmosphere. Her entrance into our circle of friends will be the most preposterous thing! Why, she is a girl who spends four or five hours a day in reading; she makes a duty of it."

"Oh," said Rivington, giving his martial gray moustache one rather flurried stroke, "you don't tell me!"

"When you spoke to her to-night of the best sort of people," pursued Mrs. Leroy, "she thought that you meant authors, poets, and notorieties of that description."

"Oh, come, now," said Rivington; "did she really tell you that?"

"Do you know what that girl's matrimonial ambition is?" went on Mrs. Leroy. "I 'm sure it is to marry a professor in a college."

A bitterly sarcastic smile now touched the lady's lips as she added: "Some person with an eternal ink-stain on his middle finger, short pantaloons, and the habit of forgetfully wearing a pen behind his ear when he goes into the street."

"You don't mean that, now!" cried Rivington, softly.

Mrs. Leroy's voice became plaintive. "I shall do my best," she said. "I shall remember that her mother was a Van Corlear. But I have a presentiment that she will do a great deal to make us forget it."

"Oh, by Jove," said Rivington, throwing himself into a chair, "if you think that, why, send her away again."

"It is too late," declared Mrs. Leroy.

II.

MEANWHILE, during this same evening, Agnes had been seated in her chamber, writing a letter. She was writing to her relatives who had gone into the West. Sometimes she would turn away from the paper, with a quivering lip, and a desire not to let her tears drop there. But not many tears fell, after all; for this self-reliant girl kept the emotional flood-gates rather stoutly barred; she had an enormous dislike to "giving way;" perhaps she thought it morally wrong; she thought a good many things morally wrong that numerous other girls do not think about at all. She had read profusely, though unsystematically, and the sure result of such a course had been to entangle some

falsities with her truths. Her mind had endeavored to keep a distinct souvenir of every greater mind whose work it had looked upon; it had, so to speak, brought away specimens from its travels. But a fragment of the Sphinx's nose, such as tourists sometimes get, cannot be called a very representative memento. Poor Agnes had peeped down into one or two craters that were quite too fiery for her, and perhaps the bits of cold lava that she now and then looked at only served to remind her of past bewilderments. She had been very fond of the three relatives from whom she was now separated. One had been her dead father's sister, a wiry little lady who had taught school before her marriage, and whose neatness and economy should have found husbandly sympathy; but in reality Mrs. Cliffe's lord was a big, florid creature, who did everything in a lolling, reckless fashion, and perpetually tormented her for this reason, as though he had been a spot in her

carpet which she could not rub away, or a rent that her deft fingers could not darn out of sight. Then there had been a daughter, Marianna, whose age was within a few months of her young cousin's. Marianna was her father's own daughter; she was a great, rosy, bouncing girl, with a way of breaking into a wild roar of laughter when anything pleased her; and, as a rule, everything pleased her. Years of lecturing from her poor shocked little mother had reduced Marianna's laugh by several distinct tones; but it was still an awful fact; it was a sort of household Ætna, whose eruptive caprices one could never calculate upon.

All three of these relatives, aunt, uncle, and cousin, were devotedly fond of Agnes. She had lived among them as an unconscious lawgiver; she had taken her place naturally; it was like water finding its level; hers had been the strongest and clearest mind, the most even-poised temperament. But at length her

subjects had revolted. After days of hard fighting, Agnes found herself a deposed monarch. They would not let her go West with them. Since Uncle Cliffe had had the ground taken from under his feet here, and must seek a new strip somewhere else, this was no reason why Agnes should accompany him in the risky search for another foothold. Mrs. Cliffe thought wonderful things of her niece; she believed that Agnes was a light under a bushel, the bushel being cruelly secretive, and the light especially brilliant. If they went into the West, which Mrs. Cliffe shrank from as a doleful wilderness, Agnes must go and live with some of her mother's grand New-York relations. At least she must try it for a year. "Then you can come and join us, my dear," her aunt had said; "only I am sure that you will not want to come. As for ourselves, we shall get on very well. If we live all alone in the midst of a prairie, no one will hear Marianna laugh there, and that will be all the better; perhaps it will cure her."

Agnes had yielded at last, but not before she had assured herself that Mr. Cliffe was going into a really prosperous clerkship, more lucrative than anything he had enjoyed for at least two years past. The farewells had been painful; on poor Marianna's part they had been quite explosive. But all were convinced that it was for the best to leave Agnes behind, —all except Agnes herself. Only Marianna had been at home on the day when Mrs. Leroy called at the quiet little house in Brooklyn; but Marianna's account of this lady had been fervidly complimentary. Then circumstances had quickened the Cliffes' departure, and it had so happened that Agnes and Mrs. Leroy had never met each other until to-day.

Agnes had promised to "write immediately," and she was now keeping her promise. "I have been greatly surprised," were some of the words that she wrote. "I will not yet say that I have been disappointed as well, for of course I have not yet had time to be disap-

pointed. You know what I expected to find Mrs. Russell Leroy. With her wealth and opportunities, it seemed to me that she must be surrounded by the most remarkable minds of the time; I was prepared for a woman of splendid force. Whatever put this idea into our heads, none of us can tell; can we? But we must all remember the Mrs. Leroy of our imagination — and expectation. Well, I have found my cousin very different from all that. She is extremely graceful, and she dresses like the figures in the fashion-magazines. I fancy she would rather die than be out of the fashion. But she carries herself with an air, I can assure you, and already it has grown a pleasure for me to watch her. You know I like to study people; she represents an idea so distinctly that she interests me. I think that I have already got to understand her thoroughly, though for my own sake I hope not. I am afraid, however, that I in turn am rather a puzzle to her. Let me tell you of a

little conversation which we had this evening, while I was unpacking my trunk. . . .

"My cousin Rivington Van Corlear is exceptionally handsome. He has such a stately look that I immediately imagined him on some sort of dais, standing up to be presented with something by a grateful assemblage of grandees. But it would not be a reward for conversational powers, I already feel certain. Perhaps my cousin thinks that complete physical grandeur is all that should be expected of him; but I can't be sure of this . . . I have not yet 'placed' Rivington." . . .

On the following day Agnes found herself watching Mrs. Leroy with an involuntary suspense. She felt that so large a chasm had widened between them as to make some sort of congenial air-bridge an actual necessity. "My dear," said her cousin, the next morning, "you had a visitor last evening; but I did not tell you about it. You seemed tired."

"A visitor!" repeated Agnes, with a start

and a little flush of rosy color. "Oh, cousin Augusta, was it Mr. Speed?"

Mrs. Leroy turned a shade paler. "No," she presently said. "Who is Mr. Speed?"

"A friend of mine," answered Agnes. She seemed, for an instant, on the verge of saying more, but some afterthought kept her silent.

Mrs. Leroy had been working at a small scrap of embroidery, where twenty rich colors seemed clustered in delicious turmoil. She dropped this upon her lap for a moment, letting it make a radiant spot against her black robe, while both hands also rested there, with the uplifted needle gleaming in one of them.

"Tell me about Mr. Speed," she said.

"Oh, there is nothing to tell," said Agnes. "He is the only gentleman whom I know . . . at all intimately. You shall see him and judge for yourself." There was a little silence, and then Agnes went on: "Who was the visitor of whom you spoke?"

Mrs. Leroy seemed to wake from a reverie.

"A cousin of mine — on my mother's side. Mr. Livingston Maxwell." Her pale-gray eyes swept Agnes's face for an instant, and then were lowered. "My dear Agnes," she said, "shall you not let me take you to my dress-maker's and have a few new costumes made?"

Agnes bit her lip ever so slightly. "Do you mean ball-dresses?" she asked.

Mrs. Leroy brightened a little. "Yes, my dear. Three or four ball-dresses in the latest fashion, and perhaps an evening dress or two. We might go round to Fourbellini's this morning. I will have the *coupé* ordered."

"Very well," said Agnes, musingly, after a pause.

The ladies entered a glossy little carriage, about a half-hour later, drawn by a muscular horse of faultless grooming, with ornate silver-plated trappings, and superintended by a coachman, in a shining, cockaded hat, with a tiny bunch of violets on the left lappet of his dark-blue livery. They were driven through

prosperous-looking streets in what we call the upper portion of the town, and at length alighted before a brown-stone mansion of lofty elegance.

"Did you not say you were going to your dressmaker's, cousin Augusta?" asked Agnes, as they ascended the imposing stoop.

"Yes," said Mrs. Leroy. "This is Fourbellini's."

An extremely smart butler admitted the ladies, and ushered them into a drawing-room furnished with sumptuous richness.

"Your dressmaker must be a very grand person," said Agnes, as they seated themselves on a lounge that bloomed with kaleidoscopic needlework from a ground of garnet satin.

"Fourbellini? Oh, she's a great lady," said Mrs. Leroy, with one of her faint, cold laughs. "You'll be immensely impressed by her. Everybody is, at first. She's horribly spoiled; she's the fashion, you know. But

then she is a wonderful artist — a pupil of Worth's, I believe; at least she says so. She is a Frenchwoman, who married an Italian. He is a little pale man, with eyes like needles. He goes about and collects the bills from his insolvent customers. They say that he fixes them with his glittering eye, like the Ancient Mariner. They are a wonderful pair; they are having their day, like everything else."

A large lady in dull, voluminous silk presently rustled into the room. She had vivid black eyes and gray hair worn rolled over a cushion with quite imperial effect. She went up to Mrs. Leroy and put out a hand that flashed with jewels.

"My dear Madame Leroy," she began, in voluble French, "you have come to reproach me. *Ça saute aux yeux;* I see it plainly enough in your face. We should have had your black satin ready sooner. But, *mon Dieu*, we have been giving immense reflection to it! You must pardon the delay. It

is so difficult, Madame, to achieve a real sentiment in black satin. It is like making a fine picture out of two or three pigments. But you will be generous; you will give us two or three days longer. By then you shall have a masterpiece."

Mrs. Leroy answered in admirable French. "I have not come to speak about my own affairs, Madame Fourbellini," she said. "You see, I have brought my cousin, Miss Wolverton, with me to-day. You must get her up some dresses as soon as possible. First of all, a dinner-dress and a street costume. After that" . . . Mrs. Leroy here suddenly paused and turned toward Agnes. "You speak French, my dear, do you not?" she asked.

"No," said Agnes, calmly. "I read it very well. But I do not speak it, and I understand it very slightly when spoken."

"Oh," said Mrs. Leroy, with a sort of unconscious, off-hand commiseration. "But it is of no consequence," she went on. "Madame Fourbellini speaks English perfectly."

"Yes, Mademoiselle," said the majestic dressmaker, in that language, looking at Agnes with a gracious smile.

"I have been saying," continued Mrs. Leroy, now addressing Agnes, "that you will require something nice to wear." And she repeated the words that she had just addressed to Madame Fourbellini.

Before Agnes could reply, the Frenchwoman began again, in her vehement, exclamatory way. "It is a most delightful type. Pardon me, Mademoiselle; this is no mere *banalité* that I am talking; it is prodigiously sincere, I assure you. Light-blue eyes and hair of raven blackness — the night and the morning mixed together — the pale North mingled with the tropics. It is astonishingly rare when accompanied by such a beauty as Mademoiselle's." Here Madame Fourbellini lifted her plump silken shoulders and heaved a great sigh. "But *tenez*, it is a very hard type for us — oh, enormously hard! I should

say that, in her street-costume, Mademoiselle had best choose only symbolic colorings. We shall produce for her a charming discord; she is a charming discord herself; the result will be a delicious harmony. For example, the bonnet shall be a mass of concordant tints, but these again shall clash with the waist, which must in turn reconcile bonnet and skirt. The conception is not easy; but it will come; leave everything to us, my dear Mademoiselle. . . . Then, for your evening robes, we will think out some delicate *fantaisies* — musical and poetic, you know, and with great feeling in them. Have no fear, Mademoiselle; we shall not fail; we make no claim to genius; it is genius, you know, that sometimes fails; we have but talent — painstaking talent — and, as Madame Leroy can tell you, a supreme love for art."

"Now you must give me your promise," said Mrs. Leroy, decisively, at this point, "that at least two of these dresses shall be ready inside of three days."

"I shall only want three dresses," Agnes here said; "one for the street and two for company." The young girl spoke very qui etly, and looked full in her cousin's face.

"My dear!" faltered Mrs. Leroy.

Agnes went on speaking. She now looked Madame Fourbellini full in the face. "I should like an exact estimate," she said, "of how much these dresses will cost."

Madame seemed very much astonished for an instant; she turned to Mrs. Leroy; she began to laugh in a little clucking, mirthless way, that had a peculiarly French sound. "*Ma foi*," she said, "how can I tell the young lady? — I, who never concern myself with these stupid prices. That is Fourbellini's affair." The dressmaker laughed again. "I tell him that is what I married him for — to let me follow my art only — *exploiter mon idéal!*"

"In that case," said Agnes, "perhaps I had best see your husband."

Madame Fourbellini smiled with vast po-

liteness, but the smile had a little icy glitter about it. "Really, Mademoiselle, he is not at home."

There was a slight silence. It was now Agnes's turn to smile. "I am not accustomed," she said, with gentle directness, "to make purchases without knowing their cost." She looked at Mrs. Leroy. "Perhaps we had better come again," she went on, "at some time when Madame Fourbellini's husband *is* at home."

"That is so seldom, Mademoiselle," said the dressmaker, with the least drawl, and a very brilliant smile indeed; "he has so much to keep him away from home."

"You are very good to warn me," said Agnes, taking several steps toward the door. "I shall be saved the trouble of looking for him."

Mrs. Leroy followed her cousin. It was perhaps this fact that sent a sort of politic pang through Madame's breast. Art was Art, of course, and should resent sordidness; but

Mrs. Leroy was nevertheless a customer worth saving.

"I am so wretched at remembering prices!" the dressmaker now piteously exclaimed. "It is not my fault; it is my calamity. *Dame*, let me think . . . the street-costume, Mademoiselle, would probably be" . . . And here Madame Fourbellini lightly tapped her stately forehead. Presently she named a sum which made Agnes retire at once to the threshold of the drawing-room.

"That is much more than I can afford to pay," she said. "Excuse me for having taken any of your valuable time, Madame Fourbellini."

"Oh, do not speak of it!" murmured the lady, in tones whose politeness smothered the least trace of irony.

"Good morning," said Agnes, amiably. She turned to Mrs. Leroy. "I will wait for you in the carriage, cousin Augusta, if you desire it."

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Leroy, with disconsolate coolness. "We will go together."

The two cousins were seated in the *coupé* before either of them again spoke. "I am sorry to have inconvenienced you," Agnes said, at length. Her clear eyes were shining a little more than usual.

"It has been no inconvenience," said Mrs. Leroy, dryly, "but it has been rather unpleasant."

"That is what I mean," said Agnes. Then she added, after a moment, "I thought it a trifle amusing, too."

Mrs. Leroy looked out of the carriage-window. Then she turned quite abruptly toward her cousin. "Of course it was amusing," she said. "I don't pretend to approve of Fourbellini; I told you she was spoiled; I take her as I find her; everybody does."

Agnes raised her dark brows a little. "Everybody?" she repeated. "Do you not mean only a class of people whose pocket-books permit of expensive follies?"

"Oh, come, my dear, that is a trifle personal." Mrs. Leroy laid on Agnes's sleeve a slim hand in a glove whose tiny row of buttons went far over the wrist. "I had no idea about your troubling yourself in any way whatever with expenses," she said. "I supposed that you would allow the dresses to be charged to me. I am aware that your income is not large, and I thought we would let the whole matter go without saying."

Agnes looked at her cousin very directly; she had colored somewhat, but her expression was brightly serene. "Upon my word," she exclaimed, with an odd smile, "I wish that you *would* let the matter go without saying; I should like it much better."

Mrs. Leroy understood her. The rebuke had pricked deep, but she showed no sign of a wound; it was not her way. But perhaps disappointment annoyed her even more than secret pique. She had an income of generous amplitude; she was to have taken pride in

"bringing Agnes out" with a wardrobe worthy of a regenerated kinswoman. She wanted simply to waive the whole question of Miss Wolverton's being her pensioner; it was not to be thought about at all. But suddenly Agnes had thrust the ugly fact up into her face, and made the future wear a very impracticable look. Some women, of precisely Mrs. Leroy's general worldly surroundings, would have lost their tempers under present circumstances. But Mrs. Leroy was not such a woman. She had a tireless obstinacy, and she was nerved, as we know, by a strong sense of social duty.

"We shall have to go somewhere else, and do a little bargaining," she said, the faint sarcasm escaping her almost unawares.

"Yes, if you please," said Agnes. "I should like to secure some good, cheap dressmaker, if you have no objection."

"Dear me, what a little economist I have found!" said her cousin, with neatly playful

satire. "You will be wanting to take me back with you to Brooklyn, if I am not careful."

"I am beginning to prefer Brooklyn dress-makers," said Agnes, in even tones; "they are not so æsthetic."

"I wish they were," Mrs. Leroy felt a momentary impulse to retort; for something in her cousin's voice and manner had irritated her like the presence of hidden ridicule. But she crushed down the impertinence as it rose to her lips, and leaned forward to knock on the front glass-pane of the *coupé*.

"Are we going to Brooklyn?" asked Agnes, with quaint gravity, as the coachman bent down to catch his mistress's new order.

Mrs. Leroy pretended that she did not hear this question, as she called out to the man a certain address which she had just remembered.

At dinner, that evening, Rivington looked toward his sister, and said, "You seem tired, Augusta."

"I am," said Mrs. Leroy. Her eyes wandered in the direction of Agnes. "We have had a rather hard day of it."

"Cousin Augusta has been very good to me," said Agnes, in her mild, collected way. "She has been telling me how I ought to dress myself. In a few days I shall be splendid to look upon. I shall be like Solomon in all his glory."

"Solomon was a very wise person," said Mrs. Leroy, scanning the table-cloth.

"Ah, but he was not so fortunate as I am," replied Agnes, placidly.

"Why not?" asked Rivington.

"He sometimes had evil counselors, you know."

There was a brief silence. Rivington stroked his moustache. He stole a glance at his sister, which was not returned. Mrs. Leroy went to her room for a short time, after dinner was concluded, having a slight headache, though not pleading one as an excuse

for her disappearance. She had spoken truly; to-day she had really been through an ordeal. They had visited four separate establishments before Agnes had consented to accept the proposed charges. She had attempted no haggling, no "beating down" as to terms; she had simply listened to the various propositions made her, and refused them with unflinching suavity. "It is too much; I am not prepared to give that amount," she had firmly objected, and the ladies had been driven somewhere else. But at last it was all settled. Certain orders had at last been given, and their prompt execution faithfully promised. "Only," now mused Mrs. Leroy, smelling a *flacon* in the dim seclusion of her private chamber, "if I am called upon next week to chaperone a fright, it will be her fault and not mine."

At the same moment Agnes and Rivington were seated together in one of the lower rooms. It will be remembered that Agnes

had expressed doubts, in her recent letter to the Cliffes, regarding her male cousin. Her opportunities for taking anything like accurate observations in this quarter had thus far been few and limited. She had already made up her mind that Rivington was to be set down as a silent force, though what his silence concealed still remained unknown to her. If a deep stream, he certainly ran with a very noiseless current.

"Well, you have had a very quiet time thus far, have you not?" said her cousin, sitting down beside her.

Agnes thought what a lordly presence he had; no king could have looked more kingly; she had a strong passing desire that he should surprise her with some noble mental qualities; she had never before seen so completely handsome a man.

"It is the calm before the storm," she said. "Or at least so your sister leads me to think."

"You don't find yourself getting homesick, eh?"

"I have no home, now — it is all broken up."

"Good gracious! how forlornly you say that! You must recollect that you 've brought to New York your Lares and . . . what 's the name of the other fellows? You 're going to begin all over again."

Agnes shook her head, with a rather mournful smile. She looked round at the luxurious room, glowing with rich draperies and costly bric-à-brac. "I am afraid that I must leave my household gods behind me," she said, with more bitterness than she knew of. "They are too old-fashioned; they don't correspond with your modern embellishments."

"Pshaw," laughed Rivington, "we 'll stow them away in some corner for you."

Agnes again shook her head. "I don't believe in slighting old friends," she said, softly.

"But you 're going to make lots of new ones."

She raised her brows a little; it was a sort

of winsome mannerism with her. "Am I?" she said. "I wish that I thought so!"

"You must n't be hard to please."

"Have you found me so?" she asked, quickly.

"Oh, we are cousins. We were ready-made friends as soon as we met."

"That is nice and kind of you. I shall remember it." Agnes spoke very seriously, now. "Tell me, cousin Rivington," she went on, leaning a little toward him with graceful appeal, "what is your idea of a friend?"

Rivington was silent for a moment. "Oh," he said presently, in his mellow, agreeable voice, "it 's a young lady who does n't mind tobacco-smoke." And then he laughed his gentlemanly, sweet-toned laugh. "It seems odd to smoke here, among all these fineries, does n't it? But Augusta always lets me. Shall you mind?" He had taken out a dainty little cigarette-case made of tortoise-shell.

"Oh, no, I shan't mind," said Agnes.

Several hours later Rivington saw his sister. He had returned from the club; Mrs. Leroy was reading a novel by the rose-shaded lamp. Rivington had had his nocturnal soda-and-brandy; he never exceeded two glasses; at his time of life it was not prudent; this was one of the continent virtues that made his club-advocates declare him so "solid," "superior," and generally admirable.

"I had a chat with Agnes, to-night," he said, jovially. "Now I tell you what it is, Augusta, there 's a good deal in that girl, after all."

"Yes," said Mrs. Leroy, with caustic emphasis, looking up from her book, "there is a good deal in that I wish was out."

Perhaps an hour previously, Agnes had finished her letter to the Cliffes, begun on the preceding night. One of her new sentences ran thus: "I think that I have 'placed' my cousin Rivington."



III.

THE days of Agnes's enforced quietude went by. The indispensable wardrobe appeared; she was considered ready to appear also. Mrs. Leroy had issued cards for a gigantic afternoon reception. It was to begin at three o'clock and end at six.

"I have invited four young friends to receive with me," Mrs. Leroy had said to Agnes at lunch, on this same day. "They will be without bonnets, like ourselves. Try and be down by about half past two, my dear. We will all meet in the drawing-room. You are to stand at my side and receive with me, you know. If you don't always catch the names, it will make no matter. There are a great many of them that I shan't catch myself."

Agnes had partially lifted a morsel of cold chicken to her lips; she let it fall untasted upon her plate. "Do you really mean," she said, "that you shall not know your own guests?"

"Oh, certainly, my dear. It is always that way when one has been a long time out of society, as I have been. I shall be quite sure of everybody; I shall know, of course, that I have asked nobody who ought not to have been asked."

Agnes looked bewildered. "I do not see how you will know it," she said.

"Oh, it's the easiest thing in the world. You see, I manage it in this way. I want to receive. I go to Mrs. Van Courtlandt Maxwell, who is my near relative. She has been keeping the thing up; she has actively entertained. I borrow her list."

"Oh," said Agnes, "that is very simple."

"Not quite so simple as you suppose. Mrs. Maxwell is a trifle democratic. Besides, she

has personal likings; certain people have courted her and elbowed themselves into her favor. I scan her list with a wary eye; I observe the new names; I make inquiries. More than this, I borrow another list."

"That makes the affair more complicated," said Agnes, resuming her cold chicken.

"My second list," continued Mrs. Leroy, with explanatory frankness, "was Mrs. William J. Brown's. It sounds like a very usual sort of name, does it not? But Mrs. William J. Brown is immensely particular. She has to be; she began with nothing except money, and has only won her way by the most adroit nicety of selection. If I find anybody on Mrs. Maxwell's list who is not on Mrs. Brown's, I become a trifle suspicious. I have the utmost confidence in Mrs. Brown's horror of new people; she is a new person herself. She tells me just who the strugglers are."

"It is a very remorseless proceeding," said Agnes, "is n't it? It is like the roll-call at

the French Conciergerie — only in a reversed way. You chop off the heads of all the poor plebeians."

"I draw my pencil through their names."

"That is a more honorable death; they die by lead."

"Of course," proceeded Mrs. Leroy, "there is the old steady stock whom one knows about. There is always that in our society, no matter what is said to the contrary. The mushrooms will spring up, but there is sure to be the good solid soil beneath them."

Agnes looked at her plate. "I have heard that mushrooms are usually found in barren soil," she said, slyly. "But that may be only a botanical myth."

Just then Rivington appeared at the lunch-table, looking a little handsomer than usual. He wore a close-fitting frock-coat discreetly faced with silk, and a delicate rosebud in his button-hole; he was attired for the reception.

"I am all dressed for the coming crush,"

he announced, looking pleasantly at Agnes. "How do you like me?"

"I should not like you to be crushed," said Agnes; "it would be a great pity."

"Yes," said Rivington; "especially for my rose. Don't you think it nice? I had a good deal of difficulty in choosing it. I wanted a very young bud, you know, — something appropriate to your first appearance in society. You must glance at it while you're receiving with Augusta; it will remind you of your importance."

"But I shall be expected to talk," said Agnes, lightly, "and a rose is the symbol of silence."

"Is it?" said Rivington. "Oh," he added, "I am sure you 'll find plenty to say. I am beginning to think that you always do."

Mrs. Leroy insisted upon lending Agnes her maid, Françoise, for the making of her cousin's toilet. Françoise had a shrewd eye as to deficiencies in costume, and deft fingers

for working their remedy. Agnes took all her suggestions complaisantly. When there were no more to be offered she went down-stairs into the drawing-rooms.

"Do I satisfy you?" she asked of Mrs. Leroy, who glided forward to meet her.

"Perfectly," was the answer. Into a few brief moments her cousin had condensed a prodigious amount of severe critical scrutiny. She now came closer to Agnes, and took her gloved hand: she wore the famous black satin of which we have heard Madame Fourbellini speak, and its glassy shimmer gave her slender figure a serpentine litheness. Her cold-cut face was glowing. "You are an immense success, my dear!" she exclaimed. And then she kissed Agnes on the cheek. "Come," she went on, "let me show you your bouquets. You have received five."

She led her cousin to a small table, that was overloaded with flowers. "Here is a big bunch of violets," she began, "from my cousin Livvy

Maxwell. Was n't it nice of him to send it you? Then Rivington gives you these yellow roses, and the red ones are from another cousin of mine, a Mrs. Alexander Van Tassel; and these lilies-of-the-valley are a little gift from myself. And the white roses; I had forgotten those, — they are from Mr. Oscar Schuyler, an old friend of my late husband."

Agnes looked down at the resplendent, odorous mass with glistening eyes. She said nothing; she had forgotten to speak. But presently she looked up, saying quickly: "It is too bad to leave them like that. They must be put in water."

Mrs. Leroy laughed a little. "They must be held in your hand, my dear," she said. "That is always the custom. The more you have the better. Five will make a very pretty little parterre for you to bow over."

"But I would rather not spoil such rare, beautiful flowers."

"They are meant to be spoiled. It would

be an incivility to all the senders if you put them in water."

Agnes placed her head slightly on one side. She was still staring down at the flowers; their balmy glories seemed to enthrall her. "I am half tempted to be uncivil," she said.

A little later the four young ladies who were to receive with Agnes and Mrs. Leroy entered the room. They came flocking in together to meet the *débutante*, with Mrs. Leroy moving in front of them. They were all in misty, floating garments, and carried bouquets. The first to whom Agnes gave her hand was enchantingly pretty; she had a mirthful, plump face, of almost perfect modeling; she wore little clusters of pansies all about her dress; she was something like a pansy herself. Her name was Miss Marie Van Tassel.

Next came a tall girl, with an arched nose and flaxen hair; she was extremely thin, and wore several ropes of pearls for a necklace, that produced an effect of artistic conceal-

ment. Agnes thought her an alarmingly aristocratic figure. She was presented as Miss Olivia Brown, a daughter of the Mrs. William J. Brown of whom Agnes had already heard.

Next followed a slight girl, with a remarkably small head, and features that would have made a pretty combination if they had not all seemed a few inches too near together. She had a look of vacant amiability, and she appeared a trifle ill at ease. This was Miss Juliet Lothrop, a celebrated heiress, whose possessions were spoken of as something very nearly incalculable.

Finally a young lady came forward and shook hands with Agnes, mentioning her own name as Miss Meta Schuyler before Mrs. Leroy had a chance of doing so. She had the air of being considerably older than any of her companions; you would have said that she was possibly six-and-twenty. She was irresistibly lovely; her oval face was lit with warm brown eyes, and her large figure had

a delicious, exuberant symmetry. But she struck Agnes as faultily self-possessed. It was the repose of weariness. It had a kind of graceful, pathetic mechanism. You felt that she had entered hundreds of other rooms just as she entered this one; her youth and beauty wore too worldly a touch; the dew was gone from the flower, though all its best tints yet remained.

Conversation at once began among the various ladies who now stood about Agnes. It was not specially general conversation; there were fluent little bursts of dialogue on all sides. Agnes felt that she herself had almost nothing to talk about, but everybody else seemed to find talking a very easy process. Her new acquaintances had all roused her interest, as most human beings with whom she came in contact were apt to rouse it. As yet the impulse could have no concern with sympathy; it was only an active curiosity toward closer personal observation.

"This is your first appearance in public, is n't it, Miss Wolverton?" said Miss Marie Van Tassel, the young lady with the pansies, in a tone of rattling buoyancy. "Well, we have all of us just come out into society, you know, except Meta Schuyler, there. Take my advice, and don't feel a bit frightened. I did n't care a feather last week, when I came out, and now it seems like several seasons ago."

"Nothing ever frightens you, Marie," said Miss Olivia Brown, the thin girl with the high nose and pearl necklace. She spoke with a mincing calmness. She was looking at Agnes, or rather at Agnes's toilet. Mrs. Leroy's cousin felt that the gaze was somehow a ransacking one, and that the smallest detail of her wardrobe was being mercilessly scanned. "For my part," she went on, in her neat, exact semitone, "I think it very disagreeable to be stared at for three or four hours."

"Yes," said Agnes, "the staring must be unpleasant."

"I love it!" exclaimed Marie Van Tassel, smelling her bouquet. "If people choose to look you out of countenance, why, let them. But I got a stiff neck at home last week from bowing so much. And then the dowagers that 'my dear you,' and *will* hold your hand, and remember you when you were a baby, and all that. They were a frightful bore!"

"I shall be saved any such trial," said Agnes. "Nobody is going to remember me when I was a baby — or at any time whatever. It is a comforting reflection for me to consider what a novelty I shall be."

Miss Brown lifted her eyebrows. Agnes was convinced that she had shocked her a little; it had somehow been written by fate that she should produce this effect on Miss Brown; she had seen it coming.

"I think that the dowagers whom one meets are mostly charming," said Miss Brown. "They make us remember that society here in America has something solid about it. I

should like, though, if we had titles here, as they have abroad. Titles are so nice and dignified."

"I have heard that they do not always dignify," said Agnes, with one of her smiles.

"Titles!" exclaimed Marie Van Tassel. "Oh, I adore them! I mean to marry one, if I can. They say American girls are all crazy about them. I 'm sure that I am. I love a handle to one's name. It makes it so much easier to carry."

"Ah," said Agnes, "you forget that the handle is not of much account if the pitcher leaks."

Marie Van Tassel and Olivia Brown both looked rather puzzled for a moment. Then the first young lady broke into a gay laugh. But the other remained perfectly grave. "She has made up her mind to disapprove of me," thought Agnes, with inward amusement. Marie Van Tassel wheeled suddenly about like a sportive child, raising both of her fat,

pink shoulders. "I hope you are going to have dancing," she said to Agnes, after this coquettish gyration was completed. "Receptions are so dull without it."

"I have not heard whether we shall have it," said Agnes.

"Dancing has its disadvantages," said Miss Brown, primly. "You are sometimes forced to dance with gentlemen whom you do not like."

"*I* never am," said Marie. "I do just as I please about that. I tell all sorts of bold fibs. I say 'Oh, please excuse me — I 'm so tired,' and dance with somebody else a moment afterward."

"That is not etiquette," said Miss Brown.

"Oh, bother etiquette," laughed Marie. "I mean to enjoy myself."

"Yes, Marie always manages to do that," said Miss Juliet Lothrop, the heiress, wreathing her little pinched-up face in a transient smile. She looked at Agnes almost plaint-

ively. "Miss Van Tassel has so much small-talk," she continued. "I envy people with a great deal of small-talk; don't you, Miss Wolverton?"

"I should n't want it to be my most enviable point," said Agnes, evasively.

"But you have to have it, you know," said Juliet Lothrop, very seriously. "It saves you from being a wall-flower." She spoke with a strong lisp, and her voice had a piping note in it that was not unlike the bleat of a lamb. "They tell me that I must n't be a wall-flower, whatever I do."

"Not even if you are a well-trained one?" asked Agnes.

"*I'm* a night-blooming cereus!" cried Marie Van Tassel, merrily; "except at receptions, and then I 'm a four-o'clock!"

Agnes found herself beginning to have an odd pity for Juliet Lothrop. It seemed to her as though this young girl were laboring under a gentle resentment for some sort of

unmerited abuse. "Are you not fond of fashionable life?" she questioned.

Miss Lothrop gave a thin, joyless little smile. "I am trying to be," she said. "Mamma says I shall like it better after a while. I'm very timid; I can't help it. I've always been nervous; they say that is because I'm not very strong. When I was younger I was ever so ill; they didn't expect me to live."

Agnes could not help fancying, on general principles, that the decline had only been arrested midway. Still, she had taken a compassionate liking for Miss Lothrop; she even felt a certain congeniality toward the girl. "Perhaps it is because we are both a little out of our element," she inwardly decided.

Very soon afterward there sounded a portentous rolling of carriages in the street outside, and before many moments the arrivals came thick and fast. Agnes received her five bouquets from Mrs. Leroy, and was whisper-

ingly directed how to hold them. Then she took her place near the main door, at her cousin's side, and the reception began in full force.

IV.

THE drawing-rooms filled rapidly; Agnes found herself bowing once a minute, or perhaps oftener. Ladies and gentlemen both streamed through the spacious doorway, but ladies were in marked predominance. The former mostly wore costumes of great elegance; with some, the dainty bonnets, profusely beflowered and of lightest tints, carried but faint suggestion of street habiliment. It seemed to Agnes that nobody had any wish to talk with her. They all smiled with prodigal amiability as Mrs. Leroy murmured her name, and then, after a rather exaggerated courtesy of salutation, passed on. Everybody appeared anxious to pass on. There was always some new arrival, for at least the space

of an hour, that had to be made way for. Delicious orchestral music was perpetually sounding from somewhere in the adjacent hall. Agnes by no means caught all the names which Mrs. Leroy repeated to her, and it soon became very apparent that Mrs. Leroy in turn was far from catching all the names which her guests themselves repeated as they entered the room. But this made no difference. "My cousin, Miss Wolverton," was pronounced exactly the same by the hostess, for an astonishing number of times. Mrs. Leroy sometimes chatted for a moment with certain new-comers, and in tones of such sociability that her companion suspected it had been a relief to find them people whom she really knew. "Are you tired?" she at length asked, very much under her breath, during a slight pause in the genteel rush.

"A little," said Agnes.

"I am horribly so. But it will be over soon, and then we can move about. Recollect that you know everybody now."

Agnes wondered if there were many whose names she really knew. Just then two gentlemen crossed the threshold. One was a small, jaunty man, who shook hands quite cordially with Mrs. Leroy, and then turned to his associate, who lingered several paces behind him. "Allow me to present Lord Heatherington," said the jaunty man, with extreme ceremony.

Lord Heatherington was a slight person, with an aerial yellow beard, bland blue eyes, and an aspect of excessive good breeding. Mrs. Leroy bowed much lower than Agnes had yet seen her bow, while she extended her hand. "My cousin, Miss Wolverton," was now rather slow in coming, for she first took occasion to exchange several sentences with his lordship that the music and the surrounding babble made it impossible for Agnes to hear. But the words were spoken with a smile and an eager bending forward of the head, which revealed that her cousin's re-

sources of amiability had not yet put forth their most elaborate efforts.

Then Lord Heatherington and his friend were made to know Agnes, and afterward they were swallowed up in the throng.

"A young English earl," whispered Mrs. Leroy, rather excitedly for her. "I am very glad to have got him. He had been promised to me for to-day, but I had begun to feel doubtful."

"You speak of him as if he were a piece of spun sugar," said Agnes.

"He is," replied Mrs. Leroy, good-humoredly; "he is my centre-piece. All the rest of us are side-dishes." She made a motion to a gentleman who was not far away. The gentleman glided up to her with graceful speed. He was of middle stature, with golden curling hair, worn very short, and a crisp amber moustache; his dark-blue eyes were softly expressive, and his features had the delicacy of a cameo. Agnes thought him a notably hand-

some creature; he did not seem to her like an ordinary flesh-and-blood man; not that he impressed her as being of any superior species, but simply that he looked of airier and finer physical make. It was like seeing a slim-throated Parian urn contrasted with heavy pottery.

"Livvy," said Mrs. Leroy, "Miss Wolverton thinks she has had enough of receiving for the present. Won't you take her where she can get a little champagne and water, and sit down quietly, you know?" Then Mrs. Leroy turned toward Agnes. "This is my cousin, Mr. Livingston Maxwell," she proceeded. "You have more than once heard me speak of him."

Mr. Maxwell at once gave Agnes his arm. "You must be very tired," he said, looking at her with his deep, sympathetic eyes.

"I think I am more dazed than fatigued," answered Agnes. "But still my bewilderment shall not prevent me from remembering, Mr. Maxwell, that you sent me these charming violets."

"Oh, how good of you to remember which bouquet it was," he said, with simple carelessness. "Here is a nice retired seat," he went on, "where you can remain unmolested till I get you something. What shall it be?"

"Only a glass of water, if you please," said Agnes. "I do not care for anything else."

"You are sure you don't want a drop of wine in it? Or could n't you manage a bit of ice-cream?"

"Yes, I should like some ice-cream. You have reminded me of just what I do want."

Livingston Maxwell slipped away, leaving a pleasant sense with Agnes that after those few words they had somehow begun to be actually intimate. She had felt something in his presence that was like the potency of a spell. Her analytic tendencies at once became busy during his absence. Where was the charm? Did it lie most in voice or appearance, or was it equally in both? She quickly found herself baffled, as more than

one of her sex had been before now by this same strangely attractive personality. And as yet Agnes was quite ignorant that she had talked with the favorite of social favorites, the reigning fashionable star, the young gentleman of whom some one had once said that untold flattery could only make him more delightfully worthy of receiving it.

He presently returned; he had got a plate of cream for himself also, and dropped into an opportune seat at Agnes's side, a little lower than her own. "I am not going to ask you how you like society," he said. "I am sure it's quite too early for that question. You are tremendously confused in your impressions, are you not? You feel as if you were looking through a kaleidoscope that somebody else was turning much too rapidly."

"Yes," said Agnes, "but I hope it will all prove something better than bits of painted glass."

Her companion threw back his head and

laughed like a boy. "Why distress oneself about that? Our cousin Augusta says that you sometimes say very severe things." He raised one finger, and shook it in jocose admonition. "This will never do, I assure you. We must begin all over again; we must reform."

"I am afraid I am too old a sinner," said Agnes. "My severe things are generally true ones. Is society very hard on you if you tell the truth?"

"Yes," he said, with a sort of dance in his eyes. "It never forgives that. Ah!" he added, shaking his head with arch gravity, "you are going into it like a critic. Another fault that it never forgives."

"How must you go into it, pray?"

"As a blind disciple. You must do whatever it tells you to do, in devout, unquestioning faith."

"How does it punish you when you don't do this? when you are disobedient?"

"It drives you to the wall."

"Yes, I have heard," said Agnes. "You are made a wall-flower of."

"Precisely."

"Which means that you are generally ignored and neglected."

"Yes, I am afraid it does. But there can be no such disagreeable possibility in your case. Let yourself drift with the current. It will carry you along very safely."

"Is that your own plan?" asked Agnes.

Livingston Maxwell nodded. "Always. It 's my nature, too. I can't help having a jolly time, no matter where I go. I can amuse myself with anybody. Of course I have my preferences — who does n't?" He broke into a full, fresh laugh. "Upon my word, I find the world a remarkably fine place, and human beings an immense success. Now tell me about yourself, please. Have n't you a strong respect for sunshine?

I mean its warmth; one need n't ask you about its brilliancy."

But this honeyed sort of question received no answer, for the whereabouts of Agnes had at length been discovered, and people began to claim her conversational attention, whether from a sense of duty or because of her winning looks. Livvy Maxwell (as almost everybody called him) stood at her side for a long time, and many quick, private words passed between them during the pauses in other more ceremonious talk. They sometimes spoke of the various persons who approached Agnes, and then her companion's comments never wore the least sting; he had something kindly and genial to say of everybody. After a little while Agnes began to place a very high estimate upon his charity; she was herself constantly tempted toward the harshest severities of criticism. Most of the gentlemen who stood about her were seemingly quite youthful; from nineteen to four-and-twenty ap-

peared the prevailing age. A great many differing types were represented. Here was the slim, blond tyro, of unnatural height and extreme timidity; he had nerved himself to grapple with fashion, and he meant to persevere. Here was the dapper little veteran of two seasons, who affected to be forlornly *blasé;* he spoke in a kind of languid epigram, and now and then smoothed a moustache of microscopic down. Here was the redundantly garrulous beau, who rattled along as though silence were some personified enemy that lay in wait for him. Here was the precise deliberator, who went through all his stock of set phrases with a suggestion of oiled machinery. Here was the acquiescent stripling, who oscillated between "yes" and "no" in solemn see-saw, till you were convinced that he would agree with you just the same, were it pointless platitude or daring paradox. Here was the inexorable listener, with whom to talk was like dropping pebbles into a well, and not hav-

ing any sound tell you where they had fallen. But every separate individuality bore, as it were, a family resemblance to the other. It was somewhat as though you should run your eye along the files of dissimilar faces in a regiment of soldiers, whose uniforms made them nevertheless alike. You saw that all were at least well-bred after the same pattern, and striving for one ideal of blameless deportment.

"Most of these gentlemen are younger than I expected to find them," said Agnes to Livvy Maxwell, in cautious undertone.

"Oh, this is the young clique, you know," he answered. "Society is all divided up into cliques. The young men always come to receptions of this kind; the older ones usually yawn at the mere idea of coming."

"Are there no distinguished persons in the rooms?" asked Agnes, looking round at the loquacious throng, whose clamors were half deadened by the music.

"Distinguished? Oh, yes, there 's Lord

Heatherington, and the French minister, and a general or two of the regular army, and an ex-governor, and a bishop."

"That is not exactly what I mean," said Agnes. "Are there any very famous people? Great writers, for example, or artists?"

Livvy Maxwell shook his head. "None whom I know of," he replied. The question seemed to have puzzled him a trifle — or to have set him thinking.

"They are beginning to go," said Agnes.

"Yes; but you say that in a rather relieved tone. Are you glad?"

She laughed, with her curious little raising of the brows. "I shall remain non-committal," she answered, "and make no awkward confessions."

"I think it has been a great success, so far," said Maxwell, with a meaning smile. "I have enjoyed it prodigiously."

"But you always enjoy everything. You said so."

"Still, I have my grades of amusement. It is n't one dead-level of delight with me, by any means. Did you suppose that it was?"

She ignored his last question; she was looking at him with self-forgetful directness. "You have been here with me for a long time," she presently said. "I don't see how you can have enjoyed that, unless my discomfiture has entertained you."

"Your discomfiture!" he exclaimed. "Oh, that is delicious! The self-possessed way in which you have been managing matters completely amazed me. I never saw anything like it before."

Agnes slowly nodded her head. "That is because you never saw anything just like me before."

"Granted that you are very original."

"Only because I have gone astray into a new sort of world," she said, softly. "I don't at all claim to be unique. I have simply been put where I do not belong. Everything here

is strange to me. I am not in the spirit of it."

Maxwell leaned closer toward her, with an interested glow lighting his face. "How does it strike you?" he asked.

She was silent for a moment. "It is a flourish of trumpets," she at length said, "that announces nothing. I can discover no meaning in it. I had expected that it would be so different — that is, before I came here to live."

"Tell me what you expected that it would be," said Maxwell, with his eyes riveted on her face.

"I was prepared to feel abashed. I calculated on no element of flippancy. I thought the women might be beautiful and the men gallant, but I anticipated brilliancy, wit, learning — the most famed people of the time gathering about cousin Augusta, whom I had grown to fancy a sort of celebrity herself. I thought to meet here minds whose works I

have read and loved, — thinkers, philanthropists, poets, dreamers, — all that is great in human intellect or human aspiration" . . . She paused and looked about her, with a faint flush deepening in her face. "But these very words of mine have an odd sound here," she added, with lowered voice. "They make a discord."

Livvy Maxwell did not answer. His eyes were so steadily fixed on Agnes's profile, and something seemed so thoroughly to have absorbed his attention, that he failed to perceive the approach of Mrs. Leroy until she had begun addressing Agnes.

"Well, my dear," said that lady, "you are found at last. I have asked Oscar Schuyler and one or two other people to dine with us this evening. I think you will like Mr. Schuyler. He can be immensely agreeable when he wants — like dear Livvy there. The departures are beginning. Had n't you better come and be a little more conspicuous? I

would have invited a few of the young people to stay and make up a German — Livvy leads so well, you know — if you had only decided to dance. Still, matters have gone off very nicely as it is. You seem to have made a charming impression ; I should not dare tell you all the complimentary things that have been said about you."

The rooms were soon afterwards nearly emptied. Agnes went up to her own chamber as soon as the festivity was over. The solitude seemed strange to her, but it was refreshing. She felt pierced with disappointment, and yet the wound had not been unexpectedly dealt ; circumstances had prepared her for it. She seated herself before her writing-desk, in her modish, rustling dress, and thought of beginning a letter to the Cliffes. But after all her pen remained untouched. "I might be needlessly bitter in my judgment now," she reflected. "I will distrust first impressions and wait a little longer."

Her thoughts left the babbling multitude of which she had so lately formed a part. She saw her aunt, her uncle, and Marianna in their new, remote home. Perhaps they had not yet received her letter, and were picturing her engirt with the happy emancipation which they had been so sure that Mrs. Leroy's companionship must afford. She could imagine how her aunt might be saying, at this very moment, with a resigned smile that hid her regret, — "We ought to be so thankful that Agnes has gone to shine among her equals."

Marianna and Mrs. Cliffe had both already written. Agnes opened her desk, took forth their letters, and read them for the twentieth time. The close-lined pages held so little about themselves, and breathed so deeply of tender love for her! Now and then there were a few sentences about their long journey and their present novel encompassments; but each letter was mainly a warm, unselfish congratulation that she, their treasured and

admired Agnes, had passed at length amid that congenial sphere which her virtues and talents merited. The unconscious tears filled Agnes's eyes while she read, and her heart beat with the weary throb of homesickness. Just then there was a low knock at the door. It proved to be Françoise, who bore a message that dinner was almost served, and that Mrs. Leroy was awaiting Miss Wolverton in the drawing-room.

Agnes went down-stairs shortly afterward. Mrs. Leroy and Rivington were in the drawing-room, and with them was Miss Meta Schuyler, Mr. Oscar Schuyler, and a gentleman with a small bald head, a stiff little canary-colored moustache, and very brisk movements, who was presented to Agnes as Mr. Gascoigne. "You and Mr. Gascoigne are the only strangers, I believe," said Mrs. Leroy, as Agnes seated herself after the introduction. "But it is his own fault," she proceeded, raising a reproachful forefinger at that gentleman. "He

got here late this afternoon, and then rushed off somewhere else before he had a chance of seeing you."

"Gascoigne always comes late and stays a few minutes," said Oscar Schuyler, who had taken a portion of the sofa where Agnes now sat. "He has a theory that even too much of a good thing may be fatiguing."

"He is a comet with an eccentric orbit," said Meta Schuyler, giving one of her laughs that always had a ring of languor. "He likes to startle the fixed stars."

"Well, he never comes into collision with them," said Mrs. Leroy. "He 's too good-natured for that."

"Gascoigne," said Oscar Schuyler, cruelly, "an apology to Miss Wolverton is in order. If I were she I should insist on its being a very humble one, for having so slighted her at her coming-out entertainment."

Mr. Gascoigne, at whom everybody was now looking, had creased his small forehead in a

funny, monkeyish way, that almost completely hid his twinkling eyes. "Rivington Van Corlear, my dear old friend," he cried, "are you going to sit by and see me thus publicly slandered in your own house? That horrid cynic of a Schuyler ought to be suppressed. I exposed his incapacity at whist, the other night, in three successive games, and have since been wounded by his envenomed fangs whenever the opportunity offered. Don't mind my detractors, Miss Wolverton," he hurried on, addressing Agnes with a galloping glibness that never failed him. "I came here this afternoon prepared to prostrate myself before you with the most slavish homage. But I utterly failed to find you, after an eager search" . . .

"Of two minutes," broke in Meta Schuyler, with calm irony. Everybody burst into a laugh except Oscar Schuyler, who quickly followed up the persecution with cutting composure.

"And then he let the French minister's wife carry him off to the Montgomerys' kettle drum."

A moment later dinner was announced. Oscar Schuyler offered his arm to Agnes; Mrs. Leroy and Mr. Gascoigne led the way; Rivington and Meta Schuyler went in together.

"I think you have no recollection of having met me," said Agnes's companion, as they approached the dining-room, whose table already glittered beyond back-drawn velvet tapestries.

Agnes turned her candid look upon his face. It was dark, tranquil, and aquiline. "No," she said. "And if I had caught your name, Mr. Schuyler, I should certainly have thanked you for the bouquet which you so kindly sent me."

"There is a frank avowal," he said, with amused grimness. "How you will recover from this sort of thing when you have been

out a little longer! A few months from now you will never think of telling a man that his first meeting with you created no impression — unless you want to be unkind."

"Upon my word," said Agnes, bluntly, "I hope I shall not be corrupted into speaking falsehoods."

They were now seating themselves at the luxurious dinner-table. "Society knows nothing about falsehoods," said Oscar Schuyler. "It calls them diplomatic evasions."

Agnes smiled. "I am afraid Mr. Gascoigne was right, after all," she said, "in declaring you a cynic."

Schuyler let his tiny silver fork, shaped like a trident, hover over the moist drab of a raw oyster. "Do you object to cynics?" he asked.

"Decidedly," said Agnes.

"Then I will go in for optimism. I will cultivate rosy views of things from now until dessert."

"Might it not be better, for your own sake, if you made the reformation permanent?"

Schuyler started a little. He may have felt like laughing, but his face kept a serious look; he was a man who even smiled rarely.

"Oh, I will do anything you ask," he said. "Do you put it in the form of a request?"

"No, I merely offer it as a wholesome suggestion."

"But it is n't wholesome to be hypocritical, is it? I 'm such a confirmed old Diogenes, you know, that if I got out of my tub I could n't walk."

"I should like to chop up your tub for kindling-wood," said Agnes, laughing, "and make as cheerful a blaze out of it as possible."

Schuyler had an air of half-pleased astonishment. He had been lounging through society for years, saying his bitter, bright things wherever and whenever he chose, often piquing women into liking him and sometimes making men cordially hate him. Mrs. Leroy

was one of his allies, and among her sex he had not a few; that fact and his name and fortune had won for him toleration where his lazy sarcasms would have made another directly shunned. In a certain way he was feared; people often cultivated him to gain his good-will; the celebrity of his biting tongue silenced would-be adversaries; it was like the famed spear of Lancelot, at whose first blow, however slight, tough warriors went down. He had consented to pass through a dinner at Agnes's side, because Mrs. Leroy had put her desire for him to do so in the form of a special request. He had expected to find her vapid and unsatisfactory, as he had found most young girls during their "first seasons." Still, it was to be a small dinner, and the talk would be general. Gascoigne was to be there, and Gascoigne was always diverting. Then there was to be Meta Schuyler, his distant cousin, between whom and himself a fitful and peculiar intimacy had for

several years existed. After all, Schuyler had concluded, he could not very well be bored more than usual; was he not always more or less bored everywhere?

Agnes had given him a sharp surprise. She was like coming upon a fresh, tinkling woodland stream where one has expected to find a lifeless pool. "If you imagine that I pose for a cynic," he now said, in his placid way, "you are mistaken. I did n't know that I was one till you told me so. I have never given much attention to the subject of what I am, Miss Wolverton. But I feel sure — if you will pardon the vulgarism — that I am rather too old a dog to teach new tricks."

"Perhaps it is more a question of un-learning than of learning them," smiled Agnes. "Or perhaps," she added, with mischievous quickness, "the dog should consent to wear a muzzle now and then."

She had read Schuyler rather keenly, if not thoroughly, in these few brief minutes of their

acquaintance. He could not help coloring at her last words, they bore so stinging a pertinence; but the demonstration was one which his closest intimates had never before seen him make. The small eyes of Mr. Gascoigne detected it at once; he had a grudge against Schuyler because of recent thrusts; his good-humor was proverbial, but he knew how to make it serve, when occasion demanded, as a sort of velvet scabbard for satire.

"Goodness gracious!" he cried, in his grotesque, pouncing manner, "what is Schuyler blushing about? Why, it 's something phenomenal, like an eclipse! I feel like looking at it through burnt glass."

"Oscar would never allow himself to be eclipsed," said Meta, carelessly.

"He never does good, even by stealth; so he can't be blushing to find it fame," rattled on Mr. Gascoigne. "He has fame of a very different sort. I 've found out where all the lost pins go to. Oscar picks them up and

sticks them into people. We let him enjoy himself, and it really does n't hurt us very much."

"Not if we 're stuffed with sawdust," said Schuyler, who had quite regained his wonted self-possession.

"I am afraid we all are," said Meta Schuyler, in her soft, tired voice. "The difference is only in the quality, I begin to think."

"Oh, Meta!" exclaimed Mrs. Leroy, "what a horrible sentiment! You will be going into a nunnery soon."

"I know more than one poor fellow who would like her to take the veil," said Mr. Gascoigne, with great gallantry.

"That 's pointed," said Rivington, in jocular comment; "and very pretty, too."

"It does n't mean anything," drawled Schuyler. "Whenever Gascoigne talks with an agreeable woman he fills up the pauses by offering himself."

The conversation flowed along with desul-

tory and hap-hazard current until dinner was ended. Agnes felt as if she had been watching a troop of colts scamper about, when the ladies at length rose, leaving the gentlemen over their wines. She had never before heard such completely aimless talk; it all had the artificial flash of gas-lit tinsel. She would have given a great deal, just then, to hear Marianna's hearty, boisterous laugh.

She and Meta Schuyler seated themselves on a sofa together in the front drawing-room, and here Mrs. Leroy joined them, remaining for some little time, and at length excusing herself. Perhaps this absence was intentionally made, for the purpose of bringing Agnes and her dinner-guest into closer acquaintance.

"You are Mr. Schuyler's sister, are you not?" Agnes asked of her companion.

"Oh, dear, no!" was the prompt reply. "We are third or fourth cousins; I forget which. Did you fancy there was any resemblance between us?"

Agnes looked perplexed. "No," she said, slowly, "not a personal one."

"But you thought us alike?" questioned Meta, quickly. She seldom spoke quickly, or seemed surprised, as now.

"Yes," said Agnes, decisively, "I thought you a little alike. It seemed to me that you look at things in the same way, somehow — that you think and talk the same."

"What an idea!" said Meta, with her usual repose oddly ruffled, and a sort of jar amid her easy laughter. "Why, we are as different as the poles. Oscar Schuyler is forever sneering — and very often at his betters. He is without purpose, ambition, or energy. He might have been something in the world, if he had chosen, but he has sunk into indolent failure."

"How bitterly you speak!" said Agnes. A new idea had struck her as she saw that Meta's color had visibly heightened, and that the lovely dullness of her brown eyes had taken a liquid sparkle.

"Pshaw," said Meta, suddenly becoming her former languid self, "I forgot that we once took an interest in each other, and used to give each other advice. That is some time ago, however. We are still good friends, of course. We hold little chats at parties, you know, and now and then he takes me in at dinners."

"But you no longer give each other advice?" said Agnes.

"Oh, dear, no! We have got over that."

"I suppose you agreed to disobey each other's counsels."

"Yes. We made a compact to disagree."

"And pray," asked Agnes, "did you both radically disapprove of one another?"

Meta laughed. The self-poised woman of society now breathed from every line of her graceful posture, and spoke in her serene face bloomy with the delicate tintings of a pastel. "You have precisely hit it," she said. "We disapproved of each other very much

indeed. We almost came to a quarrel. But we are excellent friends now, in a certain way."

Agnes was silent for a moment. "I wonder if you will be offended at a question of mine," she presently said.

"I am not easily offended," said Meta, with complaisance.

"I was thinking whether Mr. Schuyler was as severe upon you as you are upon him."

"Oh, a good deal more so, I assure you. He considers me an enormous mistake. He declares that I take nothing seriously enough. He once told me that I treated life as if it were a big boarding-school, and I was one of the pupils who felt homesick, and longed for graduation-day. If you knew him better, you would understand the exquisite audacity of this criticism, coming from a man who so obviously deserves it himself."

"And you did not think there was the least truth in what he said?" asked Agnes, after a pause, looking straight at her companion.

Meta caught one of Agnes's hands, and bent toward her a smiling face. "Upon my word," she exclaimed, "you are delicious! You are a bit of the novelty that I have been wearying after."

Agnes did not smile, but she pressed the other's hand quite warmly for a second or two. "Yes," she said, "I knew that you were weary. Will you tell me what it is that you weary after?"

Meta started, and dropped Agnes's hand. "Really," she answered, in a very changed voice, "I don't think that I know. Do you?"

Agnes was again silent. "Yes," she at length said, with a sweet positiveness, "I believe that I do know. You want more things than one."

"Tell me a few of those that I want."

"Perhaps I will tell you at some other time," said Agnes. Just then the closed draperies which hid the dining-room were parted, and the gentlemen came forth. Simultaneously Mrs. Leroy entered the room at a side-door.

"Ah, ladies," cried Mr. Gascoigne, "you see that we could not stay away from you long."

"I think you have stayed shamefully long," said Mrs. Leroy.

"So do I," said Oscar Schuyler. "It was Gascoigne's fault. He would n't leave till the Burgundy was ordered from the table."

"Slander will yet drive Oscar to a police court," exclaimed Mr. Gascoigne.

"We will go together, in that case," said Meta to Mr. Gascoigne, "and sit in the gallery. I have always wanted to see the inside of a police court."

"Agreed," said Mr. Gascoigne, "we will go and hiss the plaintiff."

"I will be merciful, and throw him a bouquet," laughed Mrs. Leroy. "What will you do, Agnes?" she added.

Agnes looked at Schuyler, who had just seated himself beside her. "I will pray for a slight punishment," she said, smiling, "and an early repentance."

A general laugh followed these words, and before it had subsided one of the doors was thrown open by the dignified butler, and a gentleman entered the room. His coming produced an immediate effect of discord among these patrician figures, all clad so differently from his own. He seemed startled, though not embarrassed, and looked about him as though in search of a familiar face.

Agnes at once rose. "Mr. Speed!" she said.



V.

AGNES looked at Mrs. Leroy as she moved forward to welcome her friend. The latter instantly understood, and followed her. When Agnes had shaken hands with Mr. Speed, she turned toward her cousin and spoke the necessary words of introduction. Mrs. Leroy courteously extended her hand. There was a sofa very near Agnes, and she pointed to it, saying, "Let us sit here." Mr. Speed sat down beside her, and Mrs. Leroy withdrew to the opposite side of the room.

"You see I kept my promise," said Mr. Speed.

"That was very good of you," answered Agnes. She looked at her friend and thought what a widely different world he represented

from that of the people among whom he had just found her. He was tall of stature, and rather ungainly in build. He looked about thirty years old; his head was massive, and over its prominent brow drooped thick folds of straight black hair. His piercing black eyes and ruggedly-cut features made him seem a person of intellectual force. He wore a close-buttoned frock-coat that fitted him rather ill, and a pair of dark brown gloves that seemed an inconvenience to his large, restless hands.

"I hope that I am not taking you away from any of your new friends," he said to Agnes, in a voice of such strong bass depths that it seemed quite incapable of any mild intonations.

"Oh, they are by no means friends," said Agnes. "They are only some of my cousin's fashionable acquaintances."

Mr. Speed looked across the room, somewhat furtively, for a moment. "They appear to be very fashionable," he said, seriously. Then

he turned his eyes upon Agnes so that she saw he was taking silent notes of her festal costume. "And you appear the same," he continued; "I hardly recognized you in those splendid garments."

"I am not surprised by that," was her answer. "But there is no other change, Mr. Speed; it is all on the outside."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," he responded, with hearty directness. "Does your new life please you?" he went on.

"It surprises me," said Agnes.

Mr. Speed looked once more at the little group across the room. All its members seemed engrossed in animated talk. Mr. Gascoigne was making exaggerated gestures and speaking with great volubility, while Mrs. Leroy and Oscar Schuyler were both leaning forward, apparently to contradict what the gentleman was saying.

"Does it satisfy you?" asked Mr. Speed, doubtfully. "That was the great point, you

know. You were hoping for a congenial atmosphere when you left Brooklyn."

Agnes looked down at the tangled roses on the carpet. "Was I?" she murmured. "Oh, yes, I remember that I was." She lifted her head abruptly. "Tell me what you have been doing since we met," she proceeded, in much brisker tones. "Have you been working hard? Have you finished your book?"

"I have been working, as usual," he said. "All day I have been driving at things I dislike to do, and in the evenings I have snatched an hour or so for congenial labor."

Just then Agnes heard her name pronounced. She glanced across the room, and saw Mr. Gascoigne coming toward her. He had got his forehead all into little creases, and his bristly yellow moustache had gone up under his nose, leaving the teeth to flash beneath it; he looked irresistibly droll. "Miss Wolverton," he said, "is this the division that so often follows conquest? Your cousin has

just been telling me not to come over and disturb you; but I am very much disturbed, myself, by the thought of this permanent separation. We are all disturbed, in fact."

Mr. Gascoigne spoke with an immense, flowing ease. He was like a gentleman in some genteel modern comedy. Agnes had a sense that he had been instantly disapproved of by Mr. Speed. Flippancy was one of her friend's aversions, as a matter of course; whatever Mr. Speed was or was not, his direst enemy could not have called him flippant. She wondered, indeed, what the visitor at her side could be thinking of Mr. Gascoigne; he must seem to Bartholomew Speed as a new species will seem to a naturalist.

There was now nothing for Agnes to do but to make the two gentlemen acquainted; and this was precisely what Mr. Gascoigne had intended should be done. Mr. Gascoigne was enormously civil in his greetings; his civility began to prick Agnes in an uncomfortable way as she witnessed it.

"I suppose that you have followed Miss Wolverton over from Brooklyn," he said. "I should n't blame you if you had followed her from a much greater distance, Mr. Speed, — upon my word, I should n't. I am beginning to think that I have neglected Brooklyn most culpably. It must be a very remarkable city, if it turns out such charming young ladies." Here the speaker loudened his voice noticeably, and looked across the room. "I should like to show you some of our New York ladies," he said; "we have two brilliant representatives here at present. Miss Wolverton, will you allow Mr. Speed to join our little group?"

Agnes felt that matters were being carried by storm. She would have preferred that Mr. Speed should not cross the room, but her acquiescence had now become a necessity; Mr. Gascoigne's daring affability had made it so. She presently found herself and Mr. Speed seated amid the small assemblage of her

cousins' friends. Closer contact with their dainty, felicitous manners made Mr. Speed's angular roughness a more striking fact than before. She had a feeling that the people about him were regarding him as a curiosity that had no rightful place in their midst, and yet that they were hiding the impudence of this conviction under marks of the most impenetrable good-breeding. But Agnes perceived the impudence clearly enough; she wondered whether Mr. Speed had caught a hint of it. Possibly not, she concluded, since he was a person with a very decided opinion of himself.

"Do you come to New York often, Mr. Speed?" asked Rivington with stately suavity.

"No, sir," was the reply, "I do not. I have very little to bring me here."

"Oh, don't say that," objected Schuyler, with a glance at Agnes, "or you may offend Miss Wolverton."

Mr. Speed colored a little as he turned to-

ward Agnes. Like Schuyler, he was a man who rarely colored, but for widely opposite reasons. "I never found that Miss Wolverton was quick to take offense," he said.

"Oh, I dare say you know a great deal more about her than we do," exclaimed Mr. Gascoigne. "And you are to be envied accordingly."

"Then you are not engaged in any business in New York, Mr. Speed?" said Rivington.

"No, sir. I'm a journalist by profession. That is to say, I do work for one of the Brooklyn dailies. But besides this, I have a few pupils whom I instruct in Greek and Latin."

"I am very sorry you told that to Mr. Gascoigne here," said Schuyler, in his soft, loitering way. "He knows a little Greek, and has a weakness for airing it. He'll be trying to trip you up on Homer, in a minute."

"Do examine him, Mr. Speed," said Meta Schuyler. "We all suspect that he has been imposing on us for years past."

"Oh, Mr. Speed wants to cut the shop when he 's out in company," declared Mr. Gascoigne. "Don't you, Mr. Speed?"

"Pray tell us about your writing for the papers," said Mrs. Leroy. It seemed to Agnes that her cousin's eyelids drooped more than usual, and that the corners of her mouth had a supercilious touch. "I have always wondered how people could write all those clever things that one sees. You must have to rack your brains dreadfully; do you not?"

"No, I do not," said Mr. Speed. "It is hard work, sometimes, and I don't always like it; for I often go to it when I 'm tired with other duties. But I 'm usually a good deal in earnest, and have some ideas that I think I ought to express."

"Oh, you 're a reformer," said Mr. Gascoigne.

"Well, I can't say that."

"You leave it for others to say," observed Schuyler.

Mr. Speed fixed his keen black eyes full on Schuyler's face. "I wish I deserved to have it said of me," he answered.

"Mr. Schuyler and you are kindred souls," broke in Mr. Gascoigne, with tripping volubility. "He, too, has made a reform. He once invented a salad that caused seven grateful fellow-diners to shower their blessings upon him."

Mr. Speed laughed; his laugh was always peculiarly harsh and forced, as though humor were almost an unknown trait in his sombre, studious nature. "My reformatory attempts," he said, "are generally concerned with people who know nothing about salads; they have hard enough times getting meat."

"Dear me," said Mr. Gascoigne, pretending to look frightened, "I hope you 're not going to tell us that you 're a communist."

"No," said Mr. Speed, with inexorable seriousness, "I 'm not a communist; but I think that Fourier" (he pronounced the word in a

very English way) "was a great mind, and deserves more recognition than he has received."

"Take care, Gascoigne," said Schuyler, with his broadest drawl; "you 're getting into deep water. You 'll go to the bottom presently."

"Corks never do that," said Meta Schuyler, who had a caprice, this evening, for tormenting Mr. Gascoigne, — probably because it increased his volubility and made him more amusing.

Agnes felt relieved, a little later, when Meta had risen to go, and a general disarrangement of the group had permitted a resumption of private converse with Mr. Speed. Schuyler also accompanied his cousin, and Mr. Gascoigne, though he remained, became occupied with Mrs. Leroy and Rivington in another portion of the drawing-room.

"I am afraid that you have found your visit rather dull, so far," said Agnes.

"Dull?" answered her visitor, with sober surprise. "I don't think that is at all the

right word. It has been about as lively as anything I ever experienced."

Agnes laughed. "What is your opinion?" she said, with ambiguous brevity.

Mr. Speed echoed the laugh, in his hard fashion. "I 've had no time to form any," he said.

Agnes looked steadily at him. "I think you have formed one," she softly contradicted. "I am sure that I see one in your face."

"It is an impression, then, not an opinion," he answered.

"Well, an impression, if you choose. Shall I tell you what the impression is?"

"Can you tell me?"

"You hold that you have been wasting your time."

He stared down at his bony, gloved hands. "I have been seeing other people waste theirs," he said. He looked up at her, quite suddenly. "You must be a very disappointed young woman!"

Agnes kept silent for a moment. She was making perilous little creases with her fingers in the lap of her costly dress.

"I can't help wondering what you mean to do," Mr. Speed went on. Still Agnes gave him no answer. He drew a little closer to her. "Unless I am greatly mistaken," he now said, "you will not put up with this much longer."

She answered him without lifting her eyes. "Perhaps you *are* mistaken, Mr. Speed."

A shade of bitterness, touched also with dismay, crossed his grave face. "Oh," he murmured, "you mean that you will get used to it and like it. They flatter you here. I suppose all women love flattery, — even the best."

She raised her eyes, then. "They like civility," she said.

"Well, I spoke unfairly. I take it back. But that bald man with the little yellow moustache is an abominable flatterer."

"I agree with you."

"Do you think he means all the strange things that he says?"

"Oh, certainly not. They none of them mean anything that they say. It is out of fashion here."

"And what they say does n't often seem to have much meaning," observed Agnes's companion, with the grim hesitancy of a man who almost never jokes.

"We must pay them their due," said Agnes. "They are sometimes funny. They sometimes have a flash of actual wit. They give me an odd fancy that they have all been drinking something which deadens them and enlivens them, both at the same time. I fear that is not a very clear simile."

"It is perfectly clear. . . . And you are going to make these people your constant associates in the future? Shall you not feel out of place here? Why will you not confess that much? I don't understand your reticence on this point."

"There are things that it is useless to say," replied Agnes.

"True. I suppose you have written to the Cliffes. I should have liked to see your letters. They must have been rather homesick."

Mr. Speed shifted uneasily in his seat. "Upon my word," he said, with nervous abruptness, "I wish you would tell me what you are going to do. I am sure you have made up your mind."

"Yes," said Agnes, very deliberately, "I have made up my mind."

"You are going to join the Cliffes," he said. His deep voice had a tremor in it, though the tones were lower than any he had yet used. "I 'm sorry for that — I 'm sorrier than you think about — or care about, possibly."

Agnes had colored a little. She was inwardly thrilled with surprise. Those few broken words had seemed like a sharp revelation.

"It was bad enough to have you leave

Brooklyn," said Mr. Speed. "What shall I do if you put hundreds of miles between us?"

She smiled brightly, but more coldly than she knew. Her answer might have shaped itself the next instant, if Mr. Gascoigne had not been seen crossing the room in their direction. He joined them immediately afterward, and was at once followed by Mrs. Leroy and Rivington.

"I suppose you and Mr. Speed have been talking of old times," said Mr. Gascoigne. "Pray go on; I adore reminiscences."

"Oh, come now, Gascoigne," said Rivington, clapping him socially on the shoulder, "you 've a good many that it would be just as well to forget."

"Rivington," exclaimed Mr. Gascoigne, "I did n't expect that from you! It 's the baleful influence of Schuyler. His impertinence has affected the atmosphere."

Mr. Speed unbuttoned his coat and took out a large silver watch. After glancing at it, he rose.

"Dear me!" cried Mr. Gascoigne, "I hope we have n't driven you away!"

"Oh, no," said Mr. Speed. "It 's getting late, and I 've a long journey before I reach home."

"Yes," said Rivington, "you 've got to cross in the ferry-boat. It must be a bore."

"I am immensely glad to have met you, Mr. Speed," said Mr. Gascoigne, putting out his hand. "I trust there will be an early repetition of the pleasure."

Agnes bit her lip. Everybody had risen. "Good night, sir," said Mr. Speed, shaking hands with Mr. Gascoigne.

Mr. Speed then turned to Agnes. His large kid-sheathed fingers pressed her palm with momentary force. Then he wished Mrs. Leroy good evening. Rivington accompanied him to the door with gracious urbanity, and disappeared at his side into the outer hall.

"Shall you be monopolized every evening after this distressing fashion?" said Mr. Gas-

coigne to Agnes, lifting his shoulders and spreading out both his arms.

"Oh, Brooklyn is too far off for Mr. Speed to come every night," said Mrs. Leroy, with one of her fresh, chilly smiles.

"And then he is a very busy person, I should judge," said Mr. Gascoigne. "He seems quite without the air of taking any recreation whatever. I don't doubt that he is a monstrously clever fellow, with that remarkable head. But I am afraid we spoiled his visit."

"That would be too bad," said Mrs. Leroy; "he might never come again."

Agnes looked straight at her cousin. "Oh, yes," she said, mildly, "I think he will come again."

A moment afterward she rose. She held out her hand to Mr. Gascoigne, with a smile. "I begin to feel a little tired," she said. "I must ask you to let me go up-stairs."

VI.

"MY dear," said Mrs. Leroy to Agnes, on the following morning, "we shall go to the opera this evening, and afterward to a ball at Mrs. Huntingdon's."

"I have never been to the opera," said Agnes. "I shall enjoy it, above all things."

They were sitting at breakfast. The butler had departed, and the two ladies were alone together. Rivington, who always breakfasted an hour later than his sister, had not yet appeared. Mrs. Leroy began to stir her second cup of coffee with uncharacteristic haste.

"My dear Agnes," she said, "pray let me ask a favor of you. Do not mention, I beg, that this is your first visit to the opera. At your age one is expected to have been there.

Such a confession would simply cause needless surprise in those who heard it."

"Now that you have warned me," replied Agnes, "I shall not think of making the confession. I shall guard the truth like some hidden disgrace."

Though Agnes had never been to the opera, she had a keen musical sense, and played some of the best composers' work fairly, if not brilliantly. That evening the opera was "Faust," and Nilsson took the rôle of Marguerite. Agnes felt a childish delight as she and Mrs. Leroy entered their box, while Rivington followed, in courtly attendance. The Academy was thronged; it was what we call a magnificent house, with "standing room only," and very little of that. All through the first act Agnes sat entranced and enraptured. She thought Nilsson unearthly in her loveliness, as so many women have thought; the fantastic freshness of Gounod's melodies thrilled her beyond words; as the curtain fell

for the first time she remained quite still, without turning toward Mrs. Leroy, who was seated close at her side. A moment later she heard her cousin say "Good evening," and on looking round she perceived that Mrs. Leroy was shaking hands with Oscar Schuyler. Soon afterward Schuyler had taken a seat just behind Agnes. The sound of his low, even voice struck her at this moment as falsely discordant. What he said to her seemed thin and factitious. "I am under the spell of Nilsson," she presently told him. "I have not yet descended to earth."

"Please don't let me drag you down," said Schuyler. "I should have it on my conscience if I did."

There was a great flutter all about them. Gentlemen with spotless ovals of shirt-bosom and snowy neckties were leaning over the edges of boxes, opening their little doors and entering, while the feminine occupants, in rich attire, bowed, smiled, and talked abundantly.

Everybody seemed to be talking abundantly. Agnes wondered whether they were making "Faust" the subject of their profuse loquacity; it appeared to her almost inevitable that they should do so. She now discovered that Miss Olivia Brown, with her flaxen tresses braided and curled into the most elaborate complexity, and with yesterday's pearl necklace wound about her fleshless neck, was seated immediately at her own left, while only the velvet-topped barrier between the two boxes intervened. Miss Brown was speaking to a gentleman who had ensconced himself on an invisible stool between herself and another lady, and whose glossy blond head, seamed with a white parting of marvelous exactitude, scarcely reached above her waist. Agnes listened for an instant to what Miss Brown was saying. "I suppose that you are going afterward to Mrs. Huntingdon's," she heard; "everybody seems to be going there." . . . Agnes drew a rapid deduction that the harmonious charms

of "Faust" were perhaps not being universally discussed in her neighborhood.

She turned to Schuyler, while Mrs. Leroy was occupying herself in close converse with a gentleman who had just taken the seat vacated by Rivington. Remembering her aunt's injunction of the morning, Agnes said: "I have never seen this opera before. It is like a revelation to me. And I have never seen Nilsson before. So you can understand why I am transported."

"Upon my word, I can't," replied Schuyler. "Nilsson can act, but she is such a masculine Marguerite. I can only endure her in the last part of the opera."

Agnes remained silent. "Now I have shocked you," said Schuyler; "I see it in your face."

"Yes," admitted Agnes, "I am shocked." She fixed her light, clear eyes upon him. "It is like hearing some one call 'Hamlet' a silly play," she said. "I don't know that I could

put it stronger," she added, with a bright, hard smile.

Schuyler made a little grimace. "I don't know that you could," he said. "How in earnest you are about nearly everything! I declared, last evening, if you remember, that you would change in a little while. I think differently now. The virtue cannot perish so easily."

"You are very good to call it a virtue." Agnes lowered her voice a great deal. "Here is Miss Brown, at my elbow," she said. "She is one of the neophytes, I believe. Is *she* to undergo a radical change during the next year?"

Schuyler stole a furtive glance into the next box. "I wish you had n't put her into my mind," he said; "I don't like to think about her; she irritates me. Change? Why, good Heavens! that girl has been steeped in snobbery since her babyhood. There is no change in her possible; she has n't an idea outside of her mother's 'list;' she is all of one piece;

you see her to-night and you see her always. I used to think her mother the most deplorable snob in the world, but Olivia is worse. Now there is something to admire about Mrs. Brown; she has pushed her way into notice with masterly diplomacy; she should have had beforehand all that she has taken half a lifetime to secure; she is delightful company; she 's as sharp as a Spanish rapier and as supple as one; I never feel quite sure whether she is not making a fool of me, but I like her wit and shrewdness all the same. Olivia, however, has n't a vestige of her mother's brains. She has never struggled for anything; she simply hugs what prestige her parents have given her. She is narrow and cruel. Just at present she represents my reigning aversion, and I think I have more of those than most people."

"But is she to blame, after all, for her faults?" asked Agnes, musing. "Is she not merely the melancholy result of a bad system? She embodies the sins of her parents."

"With none of their good qualities."

"Still, I think that I could endure the daughter better than the mother," said Agnes, dryly. "Folly is always pardonable in a fool. Its commission is so much worse in those from whom we have a right to expect wisdom."

"Is that one of your home-thrusts?" asked Schuyler, looking across the house through a little black lorgnette. "I begin to fancy that you are always waiting a chance to pink me, as they say in fencing."

Agnes did not answer. The orchestra had recommenced playing, and its initial notes absorbed her attention. Schuyler remained in the box. Presently the curtain rose, and from that instant Agnes was lost to everything save the progress of the opera. She soon found herself greatly annoyed, however, by the low-toned yet distinct chat of Miss Brown, whose blond admirer still preserved his posture of cosy devotion. To Agnes this

inattention was actual sacrilege. Her own enjoyment was being sadly marred by it, but even that fact did not increase her indignation, for the petty insolence seemed thrown at Gounod's genius and all the fine art of his present interpreters. She had no idea that Miss Brown was doing an exceedingly usual thing; she had never heard of people presuming to talk at the opera. In a little while she had made up her mind what course to take. "Miss Brown," she said, leaning across the partition which separated the boxes.

Her voice was just audible to the young lady whom she addressed, and no more. Miss Brown turned her ornate head, an instant later, and discovered Agnes.

"Oh, Miss Wolverton," she said, and looked inquiringly at her neighbor.

"I must ask you to do me a favor," said Agnes, with a sort of civil decisiveness in her lowered voice. "Will you please not talk while the opera is going on? I need hardly explain why I make this request."

"Oh, certainly not," said Miss Brown, flushing. "I will keep silent, if you desire it."

Agnes turned her eyes once more upon the stage. The quiet that now ensued in Miss Brown's quarter was refreshingly observable. About ten minutes elapsed, and then Schuyler leaned down and whispered in Agnes's ear:

"What on earth have you been saying to Olivia Brown? She looks furious."

Agnes raised one finger admonishingly, but did not turn her head. She was listening with great inward delight to an aria, which she considered a much more important matter, just at this moment, than any possible remark from Mr. Schuyler could be. It was not by any means that she meant a rudeness; her impulse was only the quick, unrepressed desire to prevent a painful interruption.

When the act was ended, Agnes found that Schuyler had vacated his seat. She remem-

bered what he had told her about Miss Brown's wrath, and turned toward her neighbor. The white anatomy of the young girl's shoulders met her gaze, in a full rear view. "Miss Brown," she said, softly.

Immediately the averted flaxen head changed itself into a profile; the arched nose looked higher than usual, and the prim mouth wore a sort of pursed smile. "Yes," responded Miss Brown, stiffly monosyllabic.

"I hope my request did not offend you," said Agnes, sweetly. "I meant no offense, I am sure."

Miss Brown gave a little treble ripple of laughter. "Oh, not at all," she said. The color mounted into her thin face as she spoke; she was really very aggrieved, and thought herself the recipient of an unwarrantable impertinence. "I trust that I now have your permission to talk?" she continued.

"Oh, yes," answered Agnes, with straightforward good-humor, "you may talk as loudly

as you please, now. But I am afraid you are still angry," she proceeded, "and if so I ask your pardon."

Miss Brown bowed slowly, with the suggestion of approving and accepting the apology. Far from feeling nettled by her superb condescension, Agnes had a strong sense of its drollery. Perhaps for no very egotistical reasons it occurred to her that Miss Brown was not a person worth wasting any resentment upon.

Almost immediately afterward, Mrs. Leroy leaned down to her and said, "My dear Agnes, I fear you have done something to hurt Oscar Schuyler's feelings."

"I, cousin Augusta?"

"Yes, my dear, and I think I know what it was. You would not speak to him at all during the last act; you preferred listening to the music, and showed this very plainly."

"That is true enough," returned Agnes.

"One can listen and talk at the same time,

you know — that is, say a few words now and then."

"I have no such faculty," said Agnes, with decision.

"But, my dear," persisted her cousin, "everybody does it."

"Oh," said Agnes.

"I hope that if you have any more visitors this evening," Mrs. Leroy went on, "you will treat them politely."

"I have treated no one impolitely," said Agnes, in mild but firm contradiction.

Just then two smart male figures appeared at the door of the box; they were two of Agnes's new acquaintances, and they now presented themselves with the intention of acknowledging her cousin's recent hospitality. One of them remained, through the whole of the next act, in Rivington's seat, for Rivington had found it attractive to pass a great deal of time with some friends in a certain capacious proscenium-box.

Agnes felt martyred. Her new companion kept up an incessant flow of conversation that ran no less shallow than rapid. She had not the least doubt that Miss Brown heard him very distinctly. Perhaps she regarded him as a providential stroke of punishment. Agnes could not help wishing that Miss Brown might have the power and inclination to take this tormentor off her hands. After Mrs. Leroy's rebuke, she felt compelled to give him a fair share of her attention. He soon impressed her as the incarnation of frivolity. Poor Agnes began to think that fate had served her a very ill turn in commingling Gounod's inspirations with the whispered commonplaces that now assailed her distressed nerves almost like hisses of pure malignity. Her present devotee was anything but malignant, however; he had a long, inane face, dull, kindly eyes, and an amazing ability to say nothing redundantly. He left at the end of the act, but a confederate in persecution promptly succeeded

him. To the intense relief of Agnes, Rivington returned and reoccupied his seat during the final stirring passages of the opera.

On leaving the Academy, they were at once driven to Mrs. Huntingdon's ball. Mrs. Huntingdon lived in a spacious old house in the lower portion of Fifth Avenue. She was a little yellow old woman, who had seen forty years of New York society under conditions of more or less active participation. It was her weakness to entertain, and she entertained with great state. She always had some excuse for her festivities; she had a number of grandchildren whom it was her pleasure to "bring out." This evening a frail girl, with timid blue eyes and a splendid burden of bouquets, stood bowing and smiling at her side. Agnes felt a keen sympathy with this delicate-looking *débutante*, as she was presented to her and passed on with Mrs. Leroy among the bright-clad assemblage. She was soon separated from her cousin. Several of the gentlemen

with whom yesterday's reception had made her acquainted, flocked about her in courteous devotion. She was glad to find Livingston Maxwell among this number, and presently they were moving arm-in-arm together through the crowded room.

"This is your first ball," said her companion; "is n't it?"

"Yes," answered Agnes.

"Well, it is a fine beginning," said Maxwell, in his cheery way. "This is a noble old house — a sort of Knickerbocker house, you know. The Huntingdons, or their near relations, have lived here for an age. Have you observed the ancient mahogany doors, and the prevailing air of antiquity? Their modern upholstery can't hide that. One does n't often see such spacious drawing-rooms in New York. This house was built before property 'went up,' as they say. It was once out in the country, you know. I think it immensely nice; don't you?"

"Indeed, yes," said Agnes. She looked into Livingston Maxwell's handsome, beaming face; she thought how rare and superfine was his beauty, and how evening-dress became it. "You find everything immensely nice," she added; "I have not forgotten that."

"Oh, don't chaff me about my good spirits," he said, with a hearty laugh that showed how white his teeth were. "I can't help them, really."

"I should be very sorry if you tried," said Agnes, eagerly.

He gave a quick glance at her, as they moved along. "Well, that is pleasant, surely. You mean that you like me just as I am?'

"I don't see how any one could help liking you," said Agnes, with magnificent frankness.

Maxwell shook his head. "Ah, you puzzle me very much," he declared. "I can't make you out. Sometimes you seem to mean nothing that you say, and then you seem to mean so much more than other people do. I have

been bothering myself a good deal about you since yesterday. You won't believe it, perhaps, but I have!"

"I am not worth bothering oneself about," said Agnes.

They were now on the threshold of a dim, odorous conservatory, where huge-leaved tropical plants were massed in delicious profusion. They entered this charming place, and presently sat down below the embowering greenery. A band was playing some dreamy waltz melody off in the distance. Something brushed Agnes's cheek; she looked round and saw that it was a great waxen-leaved camellia, orbed purely amid the glossy darkness of its foliage.

"It is too bad that you do not dance," said Maxwell. "Shall you stay through the German?"

"No," said Agnes; "my cousin has decided not. The German is the chief event of the evening, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. I think it a fine invention. A good many people do not; but I never could understand their prejudice. Mrs. Huntingdon asked me to lead it, this evening; so I shall be very *affairé* after supper. I shall have my hands full, marshaling my forces."

"Mrs. Leroy tells me that you nearly always lead it, wherever you go," said Agnes.

"People ask me a good deal," said Maxwell. "They see that I like the fun and don't mind the trouble."

"But it is thought an honor to be asked, is it not?" said Agnes.

"Well, yes," admitted Maxwell, with a sort of modest reluctance; "I suppose it is. I certainly want to consider it so."

"Perhaps that is one of the reasons they call upon you," said Agnes, reflectively. A new idea suddenly struck her. "Of course you know Miss Brown," she went on; "pray tell me what you think of her."

"Miss Olivia Brown?" said Maxwell. He

broke into a laugh. "I am afraid she is a trifle unpopular; she distributes her smiles very unequally; but she is young yet, and really, I should prophesy that she will improve as she sees more of society. That girl has not had just the best sort of training, you know. But I get on famously with her; I humor her little failings; it is not such hard work, after all. And I think that she has a good heart; her nonsense is only on the surface."

Agnes kept silent for several minutes; she was drawing a comparison between Schuyler's pitiless comments and the sunny charity of what she had just heard. It had begun to be very plain to her why Livingston Maxwell was a reigning favorite.

Mrs. Leroy had made arrangements to leave at the beginning of the *cotillon;* but while she and Agnes were seated together eating ices in the supper-room, Schuyler appeared and held a little low-voiced conversation with his old friend. "Just as you please," Agnes at length

heard her cousin say; and then Schuyler turned toward herself.

As their eyes met she noticed something peculiarly grave in Schuyler's expression. "Do you talk and eat ices at the same time?" he asked, without the shadow of a smile.

Agnes understood the stealthy sarcasm, and wanted to laugh. But she kept her countenance, and answered soberly:

"It is always hard to do two things properly at once. Still, I will make an effort in your favor. By the way, has anything offended you?"

"I have been mortally offended," he replied, not quickening his drawl the least in the world. "I don't like being wickedly snubbed; what man ever did? But I have concluded to forgive you. Think of that. I hope my magnanimity bewilders you."

"Very much indeed," laughed Agnes, "since I have not an idea what should call it forth."

"Still unrepentant?" said Schuyler. "Well,

I will try to tame this haughty spirit by heaping a few more coals of fire upon your head. We neither of us dance, and so I have asked your cousin to let you watch two or three figures of the German with me. She consents. Will *you?*"

Agnes gave a very ready consent. Shortly afterward the *cotillon* began, and Schuyler found two retired seats which commanded an excellent view of it. A great many young ladies and gentlemen had seated themselves in a circle that ran completely along the four walls of one large drawing-room. Livingston Maxwell and Mrs. Huntingdon's granddaughter were at one end of this circle, beside an immense basket of flowers which was in reality made of innumerable smaller bouquets, to be distributed hereafter, during the dance. Maxwell was saying something to his partner, with his shapely head gallantly lowered toward her. Whatever he said made the young girl laugh joyfully. Agnes wondered if the

fragile, timorous-looking maiden had laughed like that once before during the evening.

Presently Maxwell rose with his companion, and four other couples rose also. They danced for a brief space, and then they all separated, every gentleman choosing a lady and every lady a gentleman from the encompassing ring of sitters. A pretty and fanciful figure was now formed in the centre of the floor, till at length a gentle clap of Maxwell's hands dispersed it, and sent its participants waltzing away in many diverse directions.

"That will go on, four couples at a time, till everybody in the circle has danced," said Schuyler, explainingly.

"It must be very agreeable."

"Sometimes it is very disagreeable," he said. "The German is a terrible tyrant in its way."

"A tyrant! I don't understand," said Agnes. "How can it be anything of that sort?"

"Observe, and you will see. Do you no-

tice that merry little Hebe, Marie Van Tassel? She has already been taken out twice. It is great fun for her; she is a favorite, besides dancing well. Her seat is down at the other end of the *cotillon;* her regular turn to dance will not come for a quarter of an hour yet. Meanwhile she will enjoy herself vastly. But a number of other young ladies will be less fortunate; they will languish for an extra turn, but it will not come. Let us select some less popular pleasure-seeker. I have found one."

"Is it Miss Brown?" asked Agnes, with twinkling eyes. "I see that she is sitting there at the right, with that preternaturally tall gentleman."

"Horrid creature!" muttered Schuyler, viciously. "No, it is not she. Miss Brown will have a fine time, this evening; her parents are social powers; there are Browns and Browns, you know; besides, her ridiculous airs charm some of the tender striplings, who think them aristocratic."

"Will it be Miss Juliet Lothrop?" continued Agnes, who began to find this unmerciful scrutiny curiously diverting. "I see her lisping something to her partner, there by that gilded cabinet."

"Oh, dear, no," said Schuyler, under his breath. "She is, absolutely, the most perfect fool I ever met, but she is worth several distinct millions in her own right. It is just as though she had been the object of an absurd conspiracy on the part of countless deceased relatives; they have all left her something handsome; nobody quite knows the sum total. That girl will be engaged before the end of the season; and she will marry rich; they always do."

Agnes looked shocked at this frigid, even brutal way of putting things; but she could not resist a smile; Schuyler employed the *mauvaise langue* to such atrocious and daring perfection. "Whom have you shadowed with your unhappy omen?" she said.

"That pale girl in pink, there at our left. She is considered of no importance whatever; I don't specially know why, but she is n't. Perhaps it is because she dances badly; perhaps because her parents do not entertain; perhaps because she cannot talk. One thing is sure; she always has a stupid time everywhere, and she is lucky if she secures a partner for the German. You see, she has no bouquet; that is a sign that she has not been engaged beforehand; she is never engaged beforehand. This is her third season; she has been keeping it up heroically; next year she will begin to drop off; human patience cannot be expected to do more."

"Dignity might do a great deal less," answered Agnes. "Mr. Livingston Maxwell is dancing all the time. Is that because he is the leader?"

"Oh, not at all. Livvy is simply the best fellow in the world. There is a certain kind

of merit that everybody acknowledges and values. There are probably ten girls waiting now, with the fixed intention of taking him out when their turn comes. I never heard of anybody disliking Livvy; it would be an impossibility; he overflows with kindliness; he disarms enmity."

"What is the secret of his success?"

"Not caring to succeed. He has but one social aim — to treat everybody with faultless courtesy. What a wonderful little gentleman he is! I never saw the *bel air* so admirably personified. Pray watch him as he approaches those next four couples who are now to take the floor. Louis Quatorze could not have bowed better than that — I have my doubts if he knew how to bow half as well. That boy is the ideal of good breeding. (I call him a boy because he is ten years my own junior.) They tell us that good breeding is on the surface. Not a bit of it, and there is the refutation.

It is a clear conscience, a pure heart, and a loving spirit. . . . Pardon my platitudes."

"No, I will not pardon them," said Agnes, turning toward Schuyler with kindling eyes. "I like you better for having one enthusiasm — for believing in somebody."

"Take care," he said, "or I shall confess to another article of faith."

"Pray do," said Agnes, impenetrably.

"You might resent the personality."

She laughed, gathering her brows a little. "I certainly should," she said. "It is so painful to be falsely estimated."



VII.

MRS. LEROY was in excellent spirits as she and Agnes drove home together, after the Huntingdons' ball. If Agnes noticed any change in her cousin, she was far from tracing such change to its actual cause. Mrs. Leroy was in reality agreeably disappointed; it was no small matter for a man like Oscar Schuyler to have sat through a *cotillon* in the society of Agnes. It had a distinct and weighty meaning; it "placed" the young *débutante* at once. Mrs. Leroy knew that it had been no friendly favor shown toward herself; Schuyler was not the man to perform such a disinterested sacrifice. No, Agnes must have had the good fortune to please him — as she had

evidently pleased Livvy Maxwell also. The thing was very gratifying. There had seemed a great deal of peril in the fact of Agnes being a non-dancer and making a firm protest, as well, against learning to dance. "I don't know what I am going to do with her," Mrs. Leroy had reflected, not long ago. "She will never get on unless she dances, and I begin to suspect that she will not get on in any case." But now the lady's fears had vanished, and her ominous prophecies were proven delightfully false. She took it for granted that Agnes was in a triumphant state; Schuyler had the art of pleasing women so thoroughly when he tried; of course Agnes had been captivated.

"My dear," said Mrs. Leroy, as the carriage rolled through the still, lamplit streets, "I am curious to know what you and Oscar Schuyler found to talk about. I thought you had rather annoyed him at the opera."

"To tell the truth," said Agnes, "he rather annoyed me."

"How?" asked Mrs. Leroy, surprisedly.

"By expecting me to give him my attention when I was listening to the music."

Mrs. Leroy bit her lip in the darkness. "Oh," she said, "as I told you to-night, everybody talks at the opera."

"I know it," said Agnes, a little regretfully; "I found it out to my cost."

Mrs. Leroy leaned back in the carriage. She was smiling to herself. "Positively, Agnes," she exclaimed, "you have a good many things to unlearn. But you are doing very well, my dear. All in all, I should say that you were doing remarkably well."

"I am glad if my progress pleases you, cousin Augusta. I wish that it pleased myself a little more."

But Mrs. Leroy was not to be pricked out of her patronizing geniality to-night; she approved too thoroughly of Agnes's recent success.

"I hope you and Oscar have not quarreled

again," she said. "I saw no signs of it when he put us in the carriage. But you have not told me what you and he talked about."

"I did very little talking," said Agnes.

"And he?" said Mrs. Leroy.

"He sneered profusely at nearly everybody," returned Agnes. "I never knew such an uncompromising pessimist."

Mrs. Leroy gave a slight, sharp laugh. She was by no means pleased; this unimpassioned criticism shocked her, when she considered that grateful satisfaction would have been much more natural, not to say appropriate. "Dear, dear," she said; "you have the most downright opinions on all subjects, and no hesitation about expressing them."

"Oh, you are mistaken there," replied Agnes, quickly. "I keep a great many opinions to myself."

"I think that Oscar likes you," Mrs. Leroy now said. "And it is useless not to suppose, Agnes, that his preference is an important

matter in a case like your own. He has influence and distinction, you know."

"I wish he had more charity," said Agnes, laughing.

Rivington was seated in one of the lower rooms when the ladies returned. He had waited up to receive them, though he had declined going to the ball. His ball-going days, he affirmed, were over; he still had a voracious appetite for all the social gossip, however, and lay in wait for its chance tidbits with eager vigilance.

Agnes went up-stairs almost immediately on her return. Mrs. Leroy seated herself, for a few minutes, in her brother's company.

"Well, how did she get on?" asked Rivington.

Mrs. Leroy shook her head. She was gazing straight into the near fireplace, whose crumbled lumps of coal made a dreamy *débris* of scarlet.

"I don't understand that girl," was her reply. "She puzzles me to death."

"What has she been doing now?"

"She has been having a remarkably nice time — or ought to have been. Oscar Schuyler was simply devoted to her; she was alone scarcely a moment. And yet she treats her success with the most matter-of-course complacency. . . . One thing, Rivington — she is a very clever girl."

"Yes, she is very clever," said Rivington. "By Jove, Augusta, now that I think of it, she's tremendously clever. And I'm not sure, on the whole, that I understand her any better than you do."

Rivington was making himself a cigarette. Mrs. Leroy looked up, and her eyes swept his profile. A smile of disdainful amusement flashed across her lips; it was a smile that she would not at all have liked her brother to see.

The next morning, shortly after breakfast, Mrs. Leroy made an unexpected announcement to Agnes. "My dear," she said, "you

are asked to a luncheon to-day. You will go with Meta Schuyler; she has promised to call for you at one o'clock."

"And are you not going?" inquired Agnes.

"No, I am not invited. It is entirely an affair for girls. It is given by Juliet Lothrop — the heiress, you know; you met her at our reception."

"Yes," said Agnes, "I remember her. She is the young lady who lisps."

At one o'clock Meta called for Agnes. They were driven together to the Lothrops' residence, in Meta's *coupé*. "It is going to be a bore," said Agnes's companion, during the ride. "These things always are."

"Why do you go, then?"

Meta screened a yawn with one of her lavender-gloved hands. She looked enchantingly lovely to-day; her bonnet was a tangle of daisies and green knot-grass.

"Don't ask me," she said; "I haven't the least idea why I do go — unless it is to escape from myself."

"Do you care for reading?" asked Agnes, after a slight silence.

"Reading? I don't know how to read. I can't enjoy the books that I know are best for me. I used to like French novels; I devoured them once; my aunt always has a lot of them in the house. But they fail to entertain me now; their improprieties have such a monotonous kind of badness, and their sentiment seems like such vapid sentimentality. . . . But here we are at the Lothrops'. What a throng of carriages!"

There was also a throng of young girls in the drawing-rooms as Agnes and Meta entered them. Miss Juliet Lothrop had a flushed, nervous look. Agnes pitied her more than ever, as she watched her shaking hands with guest after guest, and endeavoring to achieve a proper ideal of "small talk." The pain of the struggle made the result seem more meagre.

Meta was very popular. Without making

the least effort, she seemed to attract her own sex beyond the power of most women. Agnes stood beside her and listened to the conversation. Now and then she joined in it. She observed, presently, that Meta was talking with a young girl whose rosy cheeks and brilliant black eyes suited the merry crispness of her conversation. Agnes felt won toward the girl immediately; her manners contrasted with those of nearly everybody about her as a brisk spring wind with a dead summer fog. Presently she said something to Meta in a low voice, and soon afterward Meta turned and presented her to Agnes as Miss Bigsbee.

The name gave Agnes a sort of shock; it appeared to sit ungracefully on its prepossessing bearer. "I am delighted to meet you, Miss Wolverton," said Miss Bigsbee, with a sweet, dimpled smile. "I saw you last night at Mrs. Huntingdon's. What a pretty ball, was n't it?"

"Very," said Agnes. "It was my first."

"Yes. But you had had your social christening, the day before, had you not? I mean at your reception. I heard what a success that was. Everybody seemed to enjoy it so much."

"Were you not there?" asked Agnes, innocently.

"No," said Miss Bigsbee. "I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Leroy. She has not been entertaining for several years, I believe. I see that they are going in to lunch. Shall we go in together?"

Agnes moved toward the dining-room with her new friend. They sat together for a considerable period, after this, partaking of some refreshment which was supplied to them by obsequious attendants from a table that groaned with costly edibles. Miss Bigsbee was a light and extremely desultory talker, but Agnes found her breezy gayety a pleasant diversion. As far as they went, her good spirits appeared spontaneous and real; that alone was a potent

recommendation, where the atmosphere hung so heavily charged with insincerity.

"This promises to be an unusually lively winter," at length said Miss Bigsbee, bending over an ice, which she ate with a fork. "I suppose, of course, that you will join the new dancing-class which Miss Brown is getting up. You have heard of it?"

"No," said Agnes, smiling to herself as Miss Brown's name was mentioned. . . . "Since I do not dance, I have probably been excluded from the list of members."

"Oh, I think not," said Miss Bigsbee. "You will certainly be asked. Indeed, I heard that your name was on the list. It is to be something especially nice and exclusive, I am told. Each member has the privilege of sending in eight names."

"And have you decided on your fortunate eight?" inquired Agnes.

Miss Bigsbee lifted her shoulders, with a sad little smile. "I have not been made a mem-

ber," she said. "I am not a great favorite with Miss Brown, I fear."

"Neither am I," said Agnes, dryly.

"No? But her mother and Mrs. Leroy are quite intimate," replied Miss Bigsbee. "Oh, I am sure that you are to be made a member."

"Are you perfectly sure?" asked Agnes. As she now looked at Miss Bigsbee, a sudden idea crossed her mind.

"Yes," was the response, "there is no doubt of it — no doubt at all."

Agnes deliberated for an instant. "In that case," she said, "I shall be very glad to offer you an invitation. Will you accept it?"

"Thanks, you are very good," said Miss Bigsbee, with the brightest smile she had yet shown. "Yes, I shall be charmed."

Just then Meta joined Agnes. "You deserted me," said Meta. "I have been looking everywhere to find you."

"Miss Bigsbee and I have been having a chat together," said Agnes.

Meta slightly turned; Miss Brown was at her elbow. "Here she is," said Meta, significantly.

Miss Brown approached Agnes. She wore a conventionally pleasant smile; she had on a tiny black-lace bonnet that was dotted over with buttercups, and a costume that was a model of Parisian elegance.

"I have been looking for you," Miss Brown said to Agnes, in her prim, calm way. She then lowered her voice so that Miss Bigsbee, who was standing quite near, could not possibly have overheard what she was saying.

"You are on the list for the new dancing-class," she began. "Mrs. Leroy knows all about it; I suppose she has told you."

Agnes nodded. She felt an immense secret amusement. She saw perfectly that Miss Brown had struggled with a severe antipathy, but that certain considerations had induced her to make the present overture.

"I have heard that each young lady has the

privilege of sending in eight names," said Agnes, very amiably. "You are extremely kind to ask me, Miss Brown."

"Oh, it is not kind," murmured Miss Brown. "It is a matter of course."

Agnes felt more amused than ever, but she was careful to conceal the least sign of it in her face.

"I know so few people," she said. "You will no doubt understand why."

"Certainly," said Miss Brown. "I suppose Mrs. Leroy will arrange it for you."

"Yes," returned Agnes. Then she paused for a moment, and looked toward Miss Bigsbee, who was talking in a very intimate manner with Meta. "Except in one instance." Agnes now purposely loudened her voice. "I want to propose Miss Bigsbee's name. Do you know Miss Bigsbee?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Brown. Her thin, prudish face had flushed a little. She turned toward Miss Bigsbee, who had heard Agnes's

last words because of their intentional clearness.

"Miss Wolverton is so very kind," said Miss Bigsbee, with effusive courtesy.

"You have no other names to propose?" asked Miss Brown, looking at Agnes.

Agnes felt there was a polite hate in the look.

"No," she said; "I suppose my cousin will send in the others."

Miss Brown gave a slight bow and moved away. Miss Bigsbee burst into a rather self-conscious laugh. "I don't think Miss Brown was quite pleased," she said, appealing to Agnes. "Do you?"

Agnes shrugged her shoulders. "I did not observe, really," she replied, with delicious hypocrisy. "Miss Brown seems to be full of whims. If she makes me a member of her new organization, I don't see why she should not empower me with a member's rights."

Agnes glanced at Meta as she finished

speaking. The latter was watching her attentively; there was a twinkle in Meta's brown, indifferent eyes. Not long afterward she and Agnes left together, reëntering the *coupé*. When its door was closed, and they had begun their homeward journey, Meta turned toward her companion.

"You have been doing a fine piece of mischief!" she exclaimed, with a burst of laughter.

"Have I?" said Agnes, demurely.

"Of course — and you know it, too. You have agonized poor Olivia Brown. She detests Miss Bigsbee."

"I have not discovered that Miss Bigsbee is at all detestable," said Agnes. "I think she is a much nicer girl than Miss Brown. What is the objection to her?"

Meta leaned back in the carriage, shaken with mirth. She suddenly seized Agnes's hand in her own. "I am glad not to have you for an enemy," she broke forth. "You

make a much better friend. Oh, don't attempt to disguise matters with me — it is too absurd! You tried to torment Olivia Brown; I saw it perfectly."

"As far as I can make out," said Agnes, with great sobriety, "Olivia Brown tried to torment Miss Bigsbee."

"True enough," said Meta. "She is opposed to her on aristocratic principles. Miss Bigsbee is deficient in the requisite antecedents. She is a clever girl, who has a fashionable craze and nothing special to support it. She has made certain friends at school; she has played her cards adroitly, and as a result she is seen almost everywhere. But Miss Brown disapproves of her, and has publicly given out that she is not to be admitted into the dancing-class."

"Miss Brown has been checkmated," said Agnes, with a sly smile. "Miss Bigsbee has been much cleverer than she."

"How? In making use of you?"

"Certainly. She saw her opportunity and stole a march upon her foe. You must admit that it was a skillful move."

Meta burst into another laugh. "I admit that you are magnificent!" she cried. "I only wish we had one or two more of your sort to wake us up! . . . But wait till you tell Mrs. Leroy what you have done. She will never forgive you!"

"That will be terrible," said Agnes. "But I shall insist on Miss Bigsbee's membership, all the same. I would n't disappoint her for the world."

Meta left Agnes at her cousin's door. "Well, my dear, was the lunch a success?" asked Mrs. Leroy, meeting Agnes as she entered the hall.

They went into one of the side-rooms together. "Upon my word,' said Agnes, sinking rather wearily into an arm-chair, "I don't think I have learned yet to tell a success when I see one. There were no gentlemen there."

"No, certainly not — at a girls' luncheon."

"There were innumerable girls," continued Agnes. "Among others, Miss Bigsbee. You don't know her, I believe; she said that you did not."

Mrs. Leroy's lip curled. "She is quite right. And I have no intention of making her acquaintance, either. She has pushed herself almost everywhere, but she shall not thrust her name upon my list. Everybody is laughing at her tremendous efforts. I hope you will not be civil to her, Agnes. She is a very objectionable young person."

"Your warning comes too late," said Agnes. "I have been very civil to her." And then she told Mrs. Leroy just how civil she had been.

Mrs. Leroy tossed her head a little, and squared her shoulders, when Agnes had ended. She had been watching her cousin's face most intently. Agnes expected a ladylike explosion; but none came.

"Of course," said Mrs. Leroy, instead, "I shall be obliged to know Miss Bigsbee now. But it is certainly aggravating."

"Miss Brown will find it so," said Agnes, "and I confess that I am malicious enough to feel glad that she will. I have n't much mercy for Miss Brown, and I have a good deal for Miss Bigsbee. I am quite willing to have given the latter a helping hand, as it were. She has more brains than most of the girls with whom she wishes to associate; she must be a valuable addition at their assemblages. If she wants to elbow her way among them, it can't be called a very dignified desire; but neither is it dignified for Miss Brown to battle so stoutly against her entrance."

"You abominate Miss Brown," said Mrs. Leroy, looking fixedly at Agnes; "don't you?"

"Oh, no," laughed Agnes, "though there are things about her that just miss being abominable, I should say."

A smile was trembling on Mrs. Leroy's lips. Miss Brown was no favorite of hers, and there was something about Agnes's tranquil recital of how she had taken justice into her own hands and pitted herself against this cold-blooded snob that struck the lady as rather delightful.

"Well," Mrs. Leroy now said, with a shrug of the shoulders, "you have forced me upon your side, Agnes, at any rate. I suspect you calculated that I would be obliged to support you."

Agnes raised her brows somewhat archly. "Yes," she admitted, with perfect gravity, "I did count upon your support, cousin Augusta." Then a peculiar smile stole to her mouth and stayed there for a few seconds. "But in believing you would stand by me at this important period, I hope that I have not underestimated the required sacrifice."

Mrs. Leroy burst out laughing. "For Heaven's sake," she cried, "leave poor Olivia

Brown alone after this. She is no match for you, Agnes ; you know it perfectly well."

At the same moment an involuntary belief seized Mrs. Leroy that under most ordinary circumstances Agnes's match would be rather difficult to discover.



VIII.

THE evening of this same day Agnes and her cousin passed at home. Livingston Maxwell came to pay them a visit, and in the course of the conversation he asked Agnes to drive with him on the following afternoon.

"Thanks," said Agnes, "but I shall be engaged. I am going to a wedding in Brooklyn."

"Shall you make the journey quite alone?" asked Maxwell, interestedly.

"Oh, yes."

"I wish that I had been invited. I should like very much to accompany you."

"You can do so if you wish," replied Agnes. "It will give you a new experience. It is to be held in an obscure little church, and it is to be altogether an obscure little affair."

Maxwell's eyes sparkled. "If you will let me go with you," he said, "I should like it above all things."

So the matter was settled. He and Agnes went to Brooklyn on the following day. After leaving the ferry-boat they took an interminable jingling journey in the cars. They alighted to find themselves in a very pretty locality. The houses were chiefly low, skirting a broad avenue, full of trees that must have been capable of a most agreeable summer shade. Some of the residences were wooden, contrasting quaintly with the stone buildings that adjoined them. Not a few had tracts of garden-land about their doorways, and occasionally some palatial structure rose from the midst of an ample lawn.

"This is my first trip to Brooklyn," said Maxwell, gayly, as they walked along. "I am very pleasantly impressed, I assure you. I suppose it is a remote portion of the city, judging from the long ride we took."

"Yes, it is decidedly remote," said Agnes. "It is almost suburban."

"How quiet everything seems," Maxwell commented. "But it looks like a rather prosperous quarter."

"There is a great deal of genteel poverty here," said Agnes.

"Poverty?"

"Well, something very near it," was the answer. "See what an unpretentious plainness many of the houses have. People live prettily, here, on incomes that would only give them one or two narrow rooms in a New York boarding-house. The young girl whose wedding we have come to witness, and who was a friend of my cousin, Marianna Cliffe, belongs to a family whose yearly means of subsistence would not keep many of your grand friends in pin-money. I remember when the wedding was first discussed. They cannot afford a reception at home; they are so poor that they must watch how every dime goes. The mother

and three daughters can just manage to make a creditable appearance in church; but you shall see what a creditable appearance they will make. They are lovable, refined women; matters will be conducted with the utmost modesty; they will avoid the least false display, knowing that in their case it would be empty vanity, if not vulgarity as well. . . . Here we are, at the church. Is it not a cosy little structure?"

"It looks like a country church," said Maxwell. "It is charmingly picturesque. Those two big willows at the entrance must be beautiful in the summer time."

There were only three or four carriages waiting before the spireless Gothic chapel. Its interior was wrought with tasteful simplicity; a sweet, dim light filled it, as Maxwell and Agnes passed inside, among the quiet, assembled throng.

"What a contrast to the last wedding at which I assisted," Maxwell whispered. "That

was held at a fashionable church on Fifth Avenue. There were three ministers; the bride had eight bridesmaids, and I don't know how many ushers. She was only eighteen, and she married an old widower, past fifty, with an immense fortune. I suppose the groom of to-day is a young man."

"About twenty-three," said Agnes. "He has a small clerkship somewhere in Brooklyn. It is a desperate love-match on both sides; he has been saving up with all his best energy for three years. I am sure they are to-day one of the happiest young couples in Christendom."

"I envy them," said Maxwell, boyishly, "don't you?"

"How some of your friends would laugh if they heard you say that!"

"Pshaw, let them laugh. I know a few that might be glad to change places with your friend and her lover."

"I am afraid you are mistaken," said Agnes

"They don't believe in love-matches over there."

Maxwell looked steadily at Agnes for a moment. Just then the mellow notes of the hidden organ began to sound a tender wedding-march. "*I* believe in them," said Maxwell; "don't you?"

Agnes's face grew very grave. "I think that anything else is simply horrible," she said. . . . "But here is the bride. We were just in time."

The small arched doors at the end of the central aisle were thrown wide open; the organ loudened its rhythmic tones; a slim, youthful man, looking demoralized, as bridegrooms usually look, appeared with a gray-haired lady on his arm, clad in dark silk. Behind them came the bride, leaning on her father's arm. She was extremely pretty; her cheeks burned rosily, and her eyes were downcast. Her dress was of some pale, silver-gray fabric, and she wore a bonnet of the same tint, with one or

two gauzy pink roses relieving it. Behind her bonnet you saw a knot of golden hair that had broken into little rebellious curls along her white, bended neck. Then followed her two sisters, both younger than herself. They wore the plainest walking-costumes; one, a mere girl, had even sunnier hair than the bride's, that fell in two long, childish braids down her back.

The minister, an elderly man, with a meek, genial face, came down from above the altar to meet the wedding party, clothed in his white episcopal surplice. The bride and the groom took their places before him; the parents and the two sisters grouped themselves on either side.

"Does n't she look lovely?" whispered Agnes to Maxwell, as the ceremony began. "She made every stitch of that dress herself."

"You don't mean it!" murmured her companion, as though he had heard some wondrous revelation.

After the marriage-service was ended, all the guests left their seats and went forward to congratulate the bride. Agnes could not fail to observe how many pairs of eyes were fixed upon her companion as they pressed their way up the crowded aisle. Maxwell's beauty was of that rare, striking order which set him apart from his kind; Agnes felt proud of having him near her, not because he was the admired favorite of that other world from which she had brought him, but because his cordial, courteous, sympathetic look made the high-bred ease of his manner place its possessor in singular harmony with all surrounders.

Agnes at length shook hands with the bride and her new husband; she greeted each member of the family, too, taking care, of course, to present Maxwell in turn to all the bridal party. They were very glad to see her, and evidently looked upon her coming as a valuable mark of attention. But Agnes soon found that they

were greatly impressed, also, by the coming of Maxwell. He had not spoken five words to the bride before her face lighted anew; he leaned over and whispered something in the ear of the groom which caused a hearty outburst of laughter from its recipient; he held the hand of the bride's mother in his own for a moment, and won the gentle lady's heart, as Agnes plainly saw, before the first amiable sentence had left her lips.

"Oh, what a splendid young gentleman he is!" murmured the young girl with the golden braids enthusiastically to Agnes. "Do tell me, Miss Agnes," she went on, "is he very devoted to you?"

Agnes looked wonderingly at the child for an instant. Then she burst out laughing, but not the least gleam of heightened color touched her cheeks. "Yes, Carrie," she said; "he is a great deal more devoted than I deserve; but not in the way *you* mean."

"Oh, I am sorry for that!" said Carrie,

stealing a shy look at Maxwell. "I've taken a great fancy to him."

"So have I," said Agnes, merrily, and without a tinge of embarrassment.

After a few earnest questions had been asked and answered concerning the absent Cliffe family, Agnes and Maxwell drew aside, and the bridal party left the church. The guests soon followed; just as Agnes neared the door she perceived Mr. Speed stationed in the outer vestibule.

He presently joined her. "This is unexpected enough," he said, shaking hands; "I did not suppose you would be here."

"Why not?" said Agnes.

"Oh, I thought your New York engagements would not give you time." In Mr. Speed's intonation there was a latent trace of bitterness.

"I have made time," replied Agnes. She turned and introduced Maxwell to Mr. Speed. The latter looked surprised for a moment, and

a shade of annoyance also crossed his face; he had seen Agnes at such a distance away that Maxwell's companionship had escaped his notice.

He only said a few more words to Agnes; these were inaudible to Maxwell, who presently heard her respond, however, "To-morrow evening? Very well; I shall be happy to go with you." . . . Then Mr. Speed bowed to Maxwell, shook hands with Agnes, and turned away.

"That man looks as if he took everything in tremendous earnest," said Maxwell.

"He does. I don't think he ever has a light moment. He has always had to struggle hard for a living. He worked his own way through college, graduating very high there. Now he writes for a newspaper, and teaches pupils besides. I sometimes believe that the world will hear of him one day; he is at work now upon a very deep book, — a philosophic book. But if he never succeeds it will be because" . . .

"Well?" said Maxwell, as Agnes hesitated; "because?" . . .

"His own heavy seriousness will crush him. There is no cheerful leaven in his nature. He could not take a mental holiday if he tried. He reminds me of a plant that creeps away from the sun of its own accord. Perhaps he will find a hand to draw him gently back again into its light, however. That *may* come; I hope so."

"You mean a woman's hand?" said Maxwell.

"Yes."

"Are you and he very good friends?"

"Very," said Agnes. She turned suddenly, and looked at Maxwell. "But nothing more," she added, almost sharply. "Oh, dear, no!"

"He is not the favored one, then?"

Agnes shook her head. "There is no favored one with me," she answered.

Maxwell laughed as they walked along; it was a short, odd laugh, not given in his accus-

tomed way. "Are you still asleep," he said, "like the princess in the old fairy tale? Are you waiting for your prince to come?"

Agnes echoed the laugh, only with more coldness. "I never think of him," she said. "Besides, I would as lief that he should remain away; perhaps I would a little rather."

Maxwell let his eyes again sweep her face; his own had saddened unusually. "That is a strange confession," he said; "I hope you do not mean it."

"Yes," replied Agnes, with a quaint earnestness, "indeed I do mean it!" Some caprice made her suddenly change the subject. "Tell me," she said, with an abrupt softness, "do you think that Miss Meta Schuyler has any reason for her languid way of looking at life? Do you think she has ever had any great disappointment?"

Maxwell did not answer for several seconds. "I think that she is very much in love with Oscar Schuyler," he said.

"And Oscar Schuyler?" asked Agnes. "Would you say that he returned the feeling?"

Maxwell shook his head. "I don't know," he answered. "I used to believe so. Schuyler is a curious fellow. He delights in concealments; he loves to mask his best traits; and he has a great many good ones, — yes, a great many."

Agnes laughed aloud. "Why do you laugh?" said Maxwell, turning quickly.

Her blue eyes were glowing with a sweet cordiality. "A happy thought struck me," she replied. "I laughed from pure pleasure. Do you know what the thought was?"

"How should I know?"

"Well, I was wondering if you had ever spoken ill of any one in all your life."



IX.

WHATEVER may have been the brief conversation between Agnes and Mr. Speed at the church-door in Brooklyn, it wholly escaped the remembrance of the former until, on the following evening, Mrs. Leroy made a certain proposition to her cousin.

"Agnes," said Mrs. Leroy, "we have a rather stupid task to perform this evening. We must look in at the Misses Van Twiller's reception. The Misses Van Twiller are two old-maid cousins of mine, with enormous Knickerbocker ideas. They give occasional entertainments, and they have a rigid abhorrence of what they call 'new people.' They live down in Bond Street, in an old house which their family has occupied for at least

fifty years. They make their receptions so stupid and tame that people only go to them as a matter of duty. They have a punch-bowl of weak punch, and coffee, made on a table loaded with old family silver, passed round at eleven o'clock; this is the extent of their refreshment. I should like immensely to get rid of to-night's affair, and we shall only go to it for family reasons."

"I shall have other reasons for not going to it," said Agnes.

Mrs. Leroy raised her blond eyebrows. "What do you mean, my dear?" she asked.

Agnes took out her watch and glanced at it. "I am engaged, this evening," she said. "I have promised to go to a concert."

Mrs. Leroy looked still more surprised. "A concert?" she repeated. "With whom?"

"Mr. Speed," replied Agnes. "You recollect Mr. Speed, of course," she added.

"Oh, perfectly," said Mrs. Leroy. "Do you mean that you and he are going *alone together?*"

There was no mistaking the marked emphasis placed on those two final words. It was Agnes's turn to look surprised.

"Alone together?" she repeated. "Why, yes, cousin Augusta. Why not?"

Mrs. Leroy shook her head with oracular negation. "It will never do," she said, slowly. "Never in the world."

"I don't understand," murmured Agnes.

"But, my dear, I understand only too well," exclaimed Mrs. Leroy. "You cannot go alone with Mr. Speed — or any one else of his sex — to a place of public amusement."

Agnes shrugged her shoulders bewilderedly. "For what reason?"

"My dear," replied Mrs. Leroy, with great decision, "this sort of thing is not done; that is all."

"Not done?" repeated Agnes, still more astonished.

"No," persisted Mrs. Leroy. "I could not possibly hear of your going to any concert or

theatre in Mr. Speed's company, without a matron. You might do it if you were engaged to each other; but as matters now stand it would be positively not respectable."

"I have known very respectable people to do it," declared Agnes.

Mrs. Leroy lifted her brows and drooped her eyelids. "Not people who are in society," she said. "I don't doubt that it is common enough among . . . others." The last word was pronounced in a lowered tone, as though its plebeian suggestiveness were painfully clear.

"Oh, very common," said Agnes. "You have been so much 'in society' all your life, cousin Augusta, that you can't think how scandalously people who are out of it sometimes behave."

Mrs. Leroy's eyes hardened. "We cannot settle this question with sarcasm, Agnes — which, by the way, you are a little too fond of using, I have found."

"There are some questions," returned Agnes, with the best-natured of looks, "that it seems pathetic to argue. They are too trivial, cousin Augusta. They will not stand even the wear and tear of being quarreled over."

"I hope there is to be no quarrel," said Mrs. Leroy, crossing her hands in her lap.

"No, indeed," returned Agnes. "My course shall be one of unmurmuring concession. When Mr. Speed comes — as he probably will come in about ten minutes — I shall tell him what a narrow escape we have both had — how near he has come to ruining me in the eyes of society."

Mrs. Leroy rose, with an impatient toss of the head. "You are incorrigible," she exclaimed. "What is more, you are unjust."

"Unjust?"

"Yes. You have actually striven to make me seem in the wrong, when I am clearly right — when I have simply saved you from a gross impropriety."

"Ah," said Agnes, "there is nothing like the knowledge of possessing a good cause. That confers its own reward. Besides, it is so fortifying!"

Agnes spoke with the smoothest amiability of tone. It was her words and not their mode of utterance that carried a sting. Mrs. Leroy left the room, presently, with a sense that although she had conquered in her little contest the victory was somehow spoiled for her. She began to feel that there was no such thing as conquering Agnes; the girl wore a sort of concealed chain-armor that blunted every blow.

Mr. Speed came punctually, that evening, at the appointed hour. Agnes received him without her bonnet.

"I have just discovered that I can't go to the concert with you," she said.

Mr. Speed's countenance fell. "But you agreed to go," he replied, with an almost brusque reproachfulness.

"I did not know that Mrs. Leroy would

veto our plan. It is considered highly improper for two unmarried people, of differing sexes, to attend any place of amusement without a married lady as their matron."

A puzzled frown darkened Mr. Speed's face; his keen, black eyes scanned the floor a moment, then they scanned Agnes.

"I don't understand whether you are in earnest or not," he said. "But I half believe you are joking."

"Not at all," replied Agnes. "This is one of the rules of fashionable New York society — to put the matter as roundly as possible, Mr. Speed. You and I never heard of it before, of course; we have lived so long outside of the sacred limits."

"I think it a most preposterous rule," said Mr. Speed, after looking thoughtful for a moment. He always expressed his opinions in this downright, unequivocal way. He had as little satire as he had humor; it was always plain yes or no with him. "Don't you agree with me?" he added, in swift interrogation.

"I 'm afraid that I do," laughed Agnes. "But it is too bad that you should be deprived of the concert," she went on, "after your long journey. You take so little amusement; you had much better go alone."

Like all men of his temperament, Mr. Speed was suspicious, and sometimes morbidly so. For days past he had been more unhappy than Agnes knew, and his discomfort had sprung from a recent sense of loneliness that had laid no gentle touch upon his life. He had looked forward to this evening with a keenly ardent expectancy. It would be inexpressibly pleasant to separate Agnes once again from the uncongenial surroundings in which he had of late discovered her. He felt that for a brief time at least he was to get back the Agnes of old. Her sudden announcement irritated and distressed him. He put one of his big, gloved hands to his massive forehead, bending his head with a sort of melancholy fatigue.

"I shall not go alone," he said. "I shall

not go at all — unless you will consent to join me."

"That is impossible," said Agnes, almost pityingly. She felt sincere regret at the disappointment she had been forced to inflict. She knew that this man liked her — though how greatly she had never permitted herself to realize. She knew the dogged drudgery of his brain-labor, and his deep need of just such relaxation as would be given him by an evening spent in listening to delightful music, and in imparting his impressions to a sympathetic friend. For a moment Agnes half made up her mind to go and request Mrs. Leroy that she should accompany Mr. Speed and herself to the concert. But her resolve would not bear afterthought; such an arrangement must only serve as the most disastrous makeshift.

While this idea passed rapidly through Agnes's mind, a gloom had been gathering on her guest's lowered face. He now raised his head and looked at her quite bitterly.

"How is it impossible?" he asked.

"I have no right to disregard Mrs. Leroy's wishes while I remain here in her house. You must perceive this, Mr. Speed."

"Oh, yes, I perceive it perfectly!" he exclaimed, with a harsh, transient smile, that left his features drawn and gloomy.

"What do you mean?" murmured Agnes.

Mr. Speed laughed; the laugh had something saturnine about it. "Of course your new life tells on you already. Its glitter and show pleases you; the men and women, with their graceful insipidities, have won you over. I knew it would be that way. You are no longer disappointed; you begin to feel at home here. You bow your head under the yoke — a pretty, silver yoke, almost without weight. Very soon your conversion will be complete."

Agnes had colored noticeably before this unsuspected outburst was ended. She forgot her pity for Mr. Speed; she now felt decidedly

angry at him; it seemed to her that his injustice had quite passed the limits of endurance.

"Really," she exclaimed, "for one who prides himself on being an exact thinker, you leap to conclusions in a most surprising way. But I don't know, Mr. Speed, that I ought even to criticise your singular statements; they are sufficiently unwarranted to be met with silence."

"Yes — contemptuous silence!" broke forth Mr. Speed. He laughed again; then his eyes swept Agnes's face with a kind of sullen excitement. "Oh," he went on, waving both hands for an instant before him, in the most uncharacteristic fashion, "I don't doubt that I am seeing my last of you. What woman ever resisted admiration when it was backed by wealth and all these superficial refinements? You are not going to be an exception, — why should you be? This evening you have put me off with a neat little formulated objection; next week, if I came here, you would meet me

with aristocratic coolness. I was well enough in Brooklyn — that stupid Brooklyn, where there were no elegant Mr. Gascoignes, Mr. Schuylers, Mrs. Leroys. Then if I came again, you would be engaged; you would laugh at the idea of treating me civilly *now* — a poor tutor, a scribbler for the newspapers, a fellow that is actually writing a book! Oh, I see the drift of things very clearly. I had better save you the trouble of dismissing me in good earnest!"

"You are right!" said Agnes, starting to her feet. There were two scarlet spots in her cheeks as she spoke. "I think the difficulty might as well be ended that way at once."

Agnes was very angry. Without waiting for a reply, she walked quickly toward the door and disappeared from the room. Reaching the hall, she began to ascend the stairs; her heart was beating with indignation; she felt herself to have been insulted, and causelessly.

She had almost mounted the stairway when she heard Mr. Speed's step sound in the marbled hall. She half turned, looking downward. The light struck Mr. Speed's face in a peculiar way, revealing every lineament. Agnes saw, in one brief glance, that her guest looked unnaturally haggard; perhaps she saw something else in his face — a desperate suffering that resembled absolute agony.

A new pang of compassion pierced her heart; her anger vanished on the instant. She turned fully; the man's name was on her lips; she meant to call him back. She herself was almost completely in shadow, so that he could only have discerned her figure, and no more. Just then she saw him walk with haste toward the door, open it, and disappear.

Agnes went slowly up-stairs to her own room. The tears had filled her eyes. With sharp intensity of recollection, she had recalled the dreary actuality of this man's life. She remembered his numberless good traits,

his intellect, his ambition, his decisive faults, which sprang from the morbid conditions of a reflective, valetudinarian nature, experiencing no cheerful visitations by reason of its close-applied vigilance in the pursuit of scientific truth ; she remembered all this, and more, blaming herself for not having sooner felt its extenuating weight.

The whole matter haunted Agnes during the next day. Just at evening of this day she received a letter from Mr. Speed, full of eloquent apology. Her tears started again as she read it.

She answered the letter at once, taking some time to write it. "He will come again, I am sure," she told herself, after her response was sealed, "and I shall be glad to have him come."

But it was many days before Mr. Speed came again.



X.

THREE weeks glided away. The novelty had somewhat worn off from Agnes's changed life. Not that she had grown accustomed to the whirl of merry-making that surrounded her, but that its bewildering effects had now wholly ceased, and left her the coolest and most self-poised of observers. Mrs. Leroy often watched her in puzzled silence. It could not be denied that her cousin had "taken" with a number of people. She was sought after and even courted; she had been very far from a failure. And yet, in spite of her youth, all this attention seemed to fall upon her with a strangely dispassionate result. Far from turning her head, civility and favoritism had only set it

more firmly upon her shoulders. At times there was something in the manner of Agnes that roused Mrs. Leroy's covert ire ; the girl's indifference seemed to verge upon ironical amusement ; she was still as much withdrawn as ever from the world she had entered ; it was this suggestion of remoteness that now and then sharply tantalized her kinswoman. "I half believe that she actually despises the whole thing," had more than once swept through Mrs. Leroy's thoughts. But the solidness of her own self-esteem had prevented Agnes's cousin from brooding long upon so clear an improbability.

Meanwhile Agnes found her time quite imperatively occupied. She had gone to many entertainments, of various sorts, with Mrs. Leroy. Schuyler had driven her out twice in his remarkably elegant dog-cart, famed, amid a small admiring constituency, for the quiet taste of its appointments and the blooded quality of the horses that drew it. Livingston

Maxwell had also driven her out, on several occasions, and his marked preference for her society had given rise to frequent comments. Occasionally, during the brief intervals of solitude that Agnes secured between her close-crowding engagements, she would re-peruse the letters which she had received from the Cliffe family in their Western home. Her own answers were often dashed off with a perilous rapidity. "If I have been incoherent and unsatisfactory," she would sometimes write in remorseful postscript, "recollect the absurdly flurried life that I am living, and pardon me." Now and then she would stand and gaze at the unread books which she had brought with her to Lafayette Place. "What would Uncle Robert say," she repeatedly asked herself, "if he knew that I have not looked into any of the volumes which were his parting gift?" Her uncle had always taken delight in directing Agnes's reading; he was a man familiar with the best books, and full of

emphatic theories regarding those that should be cultivated by youthful minds. Poor Marianna had not proved a very apt recipient of his tutelage, and Agnes had been made to profit by his daughter's deficiencies. The past would rise appealingly to Agnes as she looked on these unopened volumes ; she would remember the refined quiet of her Brooklyn home, the congeniality with progressive thought, in all its varied details, shown through happy domestic evenings about the low sitting-room light, when Mr. Speed would drop in, when he and her uncle would argue, discuss, investigate, when Mrs. Cliffe would gently break into the conversation with her shrewd, wise objections, when Marianna's ready laughter would bubble up at the least provocation, and when Agnes herself would contradict, disclaim, or capitulate, in a spirit of good-humored yet forensic debate. At these moments everything had been sincere, natural, spontaneous. How different from the arti-

ficial, hectic atmosphere of her present life! Throughout the past fortnight she had seen walls lined with gems of rare painting, and apartments thronged with lavish beauties of decoration. But the homely comfort of that modest sitting-room, its rows of choice books, its well-selected engravings, its tastefully simple furniture, and its distinct air of intellectual repose, set against all recent memories a more than rivaling charm. The tears always started whenever Agnes read those letters from the West. Not seldom she would find them awaiting her after a return from some fashionable gathering, and then the intensity of contrast would take fresher force. Then, too, the mutinous knot would rise larger in her throat, and the yearning of homesickness pierce her with greater keenness.

"It is an unfamiliar life to me; I have nothing in my experience that corresponds with it," said Meta Schuyler, one day, when Agnes had sketched some of the chief details

in her tranquil past. Meta now sought the society of Agnes almost constantly; it seemed to affect her with some potent fascination.

"I suppose you think it was a very tame life," said Agnes.

"Tame? Oh, I am no judge of what is tame," Meta responded. "I have lost my power of judging enjoyable things; the gayer my surroundings are, the duller they seem. But my early childhood was an immensely different affair from yours. Like you, I was brought up by an aunt and an uncle. But my aunt was too assailed by fashionable engagements to remember me very often, at first. I had a French nurse, whose name was Angélique, and whose temper was demoniacal. She controlled my youthful destiny; I now and then saw my guardians at dessert; my uncle was nearly always at the club, but once in a while he would come into the nursery and give me a kiss. One day, in my tenth year, I fell sick; my aunt was filled with remorse at her

neglect, and nursed me through a dangerous fever. After that she and I were inseparable. Before I was fifteen I knew all her friends. I have had no regular coming out into society; I plucked the fruit very early, or rather it dropped into my lap. When I had got to be nineteen I had the experience and the disillusion of twenty-five."

"I am sure that you have had many admirers," said Agnes, after a silence. "And yet you have not married."

"That is very pretty of you. You mean that it is not my own fault if I have not married."

"Well, yes."

Meta lowered her eyes. "It was both our faults," she said, with infinite sadness, and very faintly.

"I think that I understand you," said Agnes, in soft exclamation.

Meta looked up, with the brisk gesture of a bird suddenly raising its head. "You are

wonderfully clever," she said; "but take care that you make no mistake."

"Oh, I observe," said Agnes, with an answering smile; "I put two and two together."

Meta now posed her head a little on one side. "And what conclusions have you drawn?" she asked.

Agnes hesitated for a moment. "That neither's fault is irreparable," she said, with great sweetness in her voice.

Meta looked at her, with a mournful calm filling her brown eyes. "If you tried to repair the past," she murmured, "it would be useless; it would be too late."

Agnes was seated quite near to the speaker, but she now leaned nearer still. She laid her palm against the back of Meta's hand, and let her fingers gently clasp what they had touched. "Do you want *me* to try?" she said.

Meta's eyes suddenly filled with a wistful lustre. "Oh, no, no," she faltered; "how could you possibly succeed?"

Agnes still clasped Meta's hand. "Let me tell you," she said. She went on speaking, with quickened voice. "I might say to both of you that each needs the other, at his best, at her best. I might say to both that both are hungry for a more satisfying life, full of healthier humanity, wiser pursuit, more vital occupation. I might say" . . .

Meta suddenly caught Agnes's hand in both her own. She held it so for an instant, looking fixedly at her companion. Then she let the hand fall, and turned slightly away. The abruptness of this act had made Agnes pause. "It would all be useless trouble now," she said, in rapid, excited tones. "Agnes, shall I tell you why?" Meta rose; the color had grown vivid in either cheek, lighting her face with a brilliant beauty.

"You puzzle me," said Agnes, who still remained seated.

"Oh, have you not seen?" exclaimed Meta, clasping her hands together and stoop-

ing toward Agnes. "You are so apart from all this new existence of yours, that I sometimes think you willfully remain so. Then again I know that I wrong you — that it is no calculated withdrawal — that you are simply your own dear self, always, and so cast in another mold from ours that while your sincerity charms us, your stronger, differing nature compels you toward this unconscious reserve. . . . But, Agnes, though you have not seen it, Oscar Schuyler has changed since you and he met. He does not think of me any longer — and for one powerful reason. . . . Oh, Agnes, he is in love with *you!*"

Agnes rose. She had grown pale. "No, no," she said, "you are wrong!"

Meta shook her head. "I believe it," she declared. "I believe it as firmly as I do *not* believe that you care for him."

It happened that very soon afterward Mrs. Leroy entered the room and put an end to

this conversation. About ten minutes later Schuyler's card was sent up to Agnes. The hour was then a little after two o'clock.

Agnes handed the card to Meta. "Will you not come down with me?" she said.

Mrs. Leroy was watching both girls keenly, beneath a demeanor of apparent unconcern. "No, thanks," said Meta; "I must go, presently."

Agnes went down-stairs alone. "I have come to propose an idea to you," said Schuyler, shortly after he had shaken hands with her. "To-day is wonderfully mild for the season. You scarcely know Central Park; you told me that you wanted to explore it. I should like you to go up there and stroll about with me for a little while."

"Is it the proper thing to do?" inquired Agnes, after a pause.

"Do you think that I would ask you to offend propriety?"

"I hope not. But I have not yet quite

mastered the subtleties of Mrs. Grundy's prohibitions. She would not permit us to go to the theatre without a matron."

"I know. But she will allow us to take a walk in Central Park without one."

"Are you sure?"

"I am sure. I know her code by heart. I ought, by this time."

"Very well," said Agnes, after another pause, "I will speak with my cousin."

She left the room, remained absent perhaps a quarter of an hour, and returned wearing her bonnet. "Cousin Augusta gives her permission," she said. "But we are to take a street-car. A close carriage would be highly objectionable. But I suppose you know this, knowing 'the code' so well."

"Of course," said Schuyler, with a grim smile. "I thought of asking you to let me drive you up in my trap; but one of my horses has gone lame; they generally select a beautiful day for any such proceeding.

However, if we got out we should be bored by having the wagon wait for us in one particular spot. As it is, we can ramble about wherever we please; we can make thorough gypsies of ourselves."

During the ride to the Park, Agnes spoke little; she was thinking of what had passed during her recent talk with Meta. She felt a great longing to help her new friend, and she silently denied the truth of Meta's professed conviction.

"Here we are at last," said Schuyler, as they alighted from the car. "What a lovely day for December!"

The day was indeed exceptional. There was no breeze whatever; the sky hung thickly shrouded in pearly vapor, where the sun made a round of dull splendor as it sloped westward. The leafless lengths of shrubbery took from the bland atmosphere a mellowing charm; the wintry hardness of their outlines had so softened that you almost looked for

some vernal evidence of bud or sprig where they flanked with woody tangles the firm, inelastic pathways. Here and there, upon the close, faded verdure of the lawns, lay delicate remnants of a recent light snowfall, whose final traces had almost wholly vanished, but whose pale residue gave threat of future rigors, and touched the misty tenderness of the scene with the pathos of perishability. But seeing the denuded vines cling to the sculptured balustrades of bridges, the groves of changeless firs lift their sombre ovals in the dreamy light, the rough-wrought cedarn arbors still hide inviting dusk below their rustic roofage, and the groups of dismantled trees melting their brown stems together in the far-off tranquil haze, you felt as if the ghost of summer were walking one of her blighted kingdoms, and bringing back a phantasmal semblance of her departed reign.

"How charming all this must have been, a few weeks ago!" said Agnes, while she and Schuyler moved slowly along.

"Yes. It 's unpleasantly popular, though. You 've no idea what throngs of horrid people come here."

"Oh, I can easily imagine that the Park is a great blessing to the poorer classes."

"How delightfully democratic you are!"

"I am human — I hope."

There was a silence. "I sometimes think you are colder than you want to seem," said Schuyler, in a voice of such unusual meaning that Agnes almost started as she heard it.

She answered him in a rapid undertone. "Perhaps you are right. But I certainly do not wish to seem cold now. . . . And yet I fear that I may, for embarrassment always draws me closer within myself, somehow."

"Embarrassment?" said Schuyler, in surprise.

"Yes."

They had reached one of the stone bridges whose fluted edge overlooked a lower roadway that wound beneath its underlying arch. They

were walking very slowly. Agnes paused and leaned against the solid, carven verge. Beyond, between the stripped tree-boughs, they could see distant church-spires piercing the still, thick air. On the road beneath them a pale, sickly man was strolling with feeble steps, while a little bright-haired child tripped and prattled at his side.

Agnes turned a grave look upon her companion's inquiring face. "Yes," she went on, "embarrassment. This world of ours is full of unhappy people whom we cannot help, yet I know two whom perhaps I could help, and I long to do it. But my wish may be misinterpreted — by one, at least. It may be called senseless interference. . . . And that would pain and distress me beyond measure."

Agnes had dropped her eyes before ending her last sentence. Amid the slight ensuing silence she heard the clatter of horses' hoofs on the broad road near by, where countless carriages were rolling. These sounds smote

upon the placid afternoon with an odd, hollow sharpness. It seemed to Agnes a long time before Schuyler responded.

"Still," he presently said, "you have made up your mind to speak?"

"Yes," returned Agnes, very quickly, looking round again. "I have made up my mind to tell *him* that he can win the sweetest and most charming of wives if he only chooses."

"How?" asked Schuyler, who had turned pale.

"By going to her and saying: 'Meta, we disbelieve in everything because we will not let ourselves believe in each other. We live idly and aimlessly because we will not seek the energy and purpose that would spring from mutual succor. We have both masked our disappointment beneath an indolent worldliness, and we parade this before one another's gaze with a sort of despairing bravado. We are both secretly unhappy, yet we strive for the foolish triumph of casting dust into each

other's eyes. Let us admit that the deception has been equally successful on either side — and end it. Let us both make the past a stepping-stone, and find our higher selves by meeting on a loftier level. Let there be no recrimination, no reproach. I deserve your pardon as much as you deserve mine. The present need not speak this in words; the future will speak it more eloquently by acts.' . . . If you should go to Meta Schuyler, and proffer reconciliation on these terms, I think you would be doing very wisely."

Schuyler was looking downward, now; she was watching his face intently; she had so watched it since she first began to speak; she was sure, some little time before the end, that she had not offended him.

He lifted his eyes and met her own. He put out his hand, and Agnes let hers rest in it for a moment. His dark face was full of troubled sternness; but she had never heard him use so kindly a voice.

"Thanks," he said. "I feel honored by your counsel." There was no trace of his old sarcasm left.

"And you will avail yourself of it?" questioned Agnes.

He put both arms on the massive balustrade and stared straight down at the earthy bend of road.

"I don't know," he said. . . . "I don't know."

Agnes touched his arm for an instant, promptly withdrawing her hand. "Tell me," she said, her voice growing persuasively musical; "are you not in love with Meta Schuyler?"

He turned a sudden look upon her face, instantly averting his eyes again. "What a waste of thunder for you if I were not!" he exclaimed, in his old, ironical voice.

"Ah," broke forth Agnes, in angry reproach, "you have been jesting with me!"

"No, no," he said, growing instantly serious

again. "But I could not help feeling slightly amused by the magnificent way in which you take things for granted."

Agnes bit her lip. She had set herself upon winning a victory, and now she seemed to see the laurel slipping from her reach. "I wanted you to be anything but amused," she said, with great seriousness. "I wanted you to be impressed — aroused — stimulated. But you have not answered my question; do you not mean to answer it?"

"You have already assumed my answer. You have already disposed of me, so to speak."

"Have I been wrong?"

Schuyler's dark, composed eyes were riveted on her face at this moment. "You might not have been wrong two weeks ago," he said.

Agnes started. "I do not understand you."

He shrugged his shoulders, and looked all about him in a rapid, disturbed way. "I hardly understand myself," he exclaimed, meeting her perplexed look again.

"But I am so anxious that you should understand yourself," pleaded Agnes, softly. "You *do* love Meta Schuyler," she went on, speaking the words quite tremulously.

"Meta Schuyler is not the only woman in the world," he said, with swift, peculiar force.

"She is the only woman in the world for you," said Agnes, with a plaintive emphasis.

"Perhaps there is one other," said Schuyler, leaning nearer to his companion, and employing the same tone as before.

She drew a little away from him; he had never seen her look so sorrowful as now.

"*I* do not know of any other," she said.

"Ah, how right I was when I called you cold!"

"It is growing late," said Agnes, drawing slowly from the balustrade. . . . "It is time for us to go." She still looked very sad; a deepened color lit her cheeks, and her lip was trembling.

Schuyler turned and followed her as she

moved along. "Are you sure that you are so cold, after all?" he questioned.

She faced him with a sort of distressed fierceness. "Oh, Mr. Schuyler," she cried, "I am afraid you are right! I *have* been wasting my thunder!"

He laughed, in a strange flurried manner. "Why are you so fond of Meta Schuyler?" he asked.

"I am fond of doing good — if I can."

"There are more ways than one of doing good," he murmured. "I think you have it in your power to bring me consolation — if you chose — if you would listen to me. Yes, Agnes," he repeated, in a voice that she had never heard him use before and that it pierced her with regret to hear him use now, "if you would only listen to me."

She met his faint smile of appeal with a glittering hardness in her blue eyes. "I would rather not listen to you," she said, and her voice had a positively icy ring.

After that she quickened her pace a little. Schuyler walked beside her with head somewhat drooped. Not another word was spoken between them till they had almost left the Park. A damp northerly breeze had sprung up; the vapor-blurred sun drooped westward, a ball of opaque crimson. "It has grown chilly," said Agnes, at length. "This is treacherous weather."

"Yes, it has grown decidedly chilly," said Schuyler, in an odd voice.



XI.

SCHUYLER left Agnes at her cousin's door. Fragmentary and almost spasmodic scraps of talk had passed between them during the homeward journey. Agnes was no longer excited or angry; a grievous disheartenment had succeeded every other feeling. After all, Meta had seen more clearly than she had seen. Why had she not profited by the warning? Why had she blundered headlong into this awkward, fatal discovery? . . . When Schuyler bade her good-by she felt a kind of dreary relief. She was absolutely without one thrill of self-gratulation as she reviewed the recent turn of events. Her generous, disinterested impulse had risen high and pure; no prompting of mere flat-

tered vanity could either soil or displace it. Agnes was neither more nor less than feminine, and perhaps under different circumstantial conditions the surprise of the afternoon might have made self-esteem tingle if it waked no stronger emotion. But any such result was now impossible: she simply deplored, from the depths of her heart, what seemed to show her, in cruel colors, the certainty of Meta Schuyler's unchanged future.

She had scarcely reached her own apartment before a knock sounded at the door, and presently Mrs. Leroy entered, holding a sealed envelope.

"Here is a telegram, Agnes," said her cousin. "It came a quarter of an hour ago."

"A telegram!" faltered Agnes. She reached out her hand for the envelope, in pale alarm, and tore it open with trembling fingers. Her thoughts had flown to the Cliffes, and a hundred fears besieged her palpitating heart. In a few seconds she had read these lines:—

"Your aunt is very ill. Come to us as soon as you can. She wishes greatly to see you.

ROBERT CLIFFE."

"Agnes, what is it?" exclaimed Mrs. Leroy. "You are as pale as death!"

Agnes handed the paper to her cousin. Then she sank into a chair and covered her face for a moment. A little later she rose again, speaking in firm, determined tones.

"I must start to-night if possible."

"Not to-night, surely," said Mrs. Leroy. "To-morrow, if you must, but not to-night."

Agnes scarcely heard these words. "I must learn about the trains," she said.

Mrs. Leroy walked toward the door. "Rivington is at home," she told Agnes. "I will bring him here at once."

She left the room, soon returning with her brother. She had taken the telegram with her, and Rivington appeared holding it in his hand. They found Agnes pacing the floor, with nervous steps and colorless face.

"I will make inquiries at the nearest hotel," said Rivington, "and find out just when you can start."

"Thanks," said Agnes. She laid her hand on Rivington's arm; her eyes burned keenly. "Pray be as quick as you can."

"Yes," said Rivington, with a brief pitying look. He turned toward the door.

As he disappeared Agnes again dropped into a seat, staring fixedly at the carpet.

Mrs. Leroy went up to her and sat down at her side. "My dear," she said, "I am very sorry for you. You have never spoken much to me of Mrs. Cliffe. I suppose you are quite fond of her."

The words had for Agnes, in her then mood, a sort of oily artificiality. "Fond of my aunt!" she cried. "I love her dearly — dearly!" And then she burst into tears.

Mrs. Leroy watched her for a moment in silence. "It will be a long journey," she at length said; "I don't know that you ought to

take it alone. Perhaps Françoise had better go with you. It is almost compromising for a young girl like yourself to travel alone."

"I deserve this punishment!" exclaimed Agnes, wildly. "I should never have let them go without me! They insisted — but I should have rebelled!"

Mrs. Leroy stared. This despairing abandonment made Agnes seem to her like a new person. She felt as if a sudden light were being thrown upon her cousin's nature; she felt, too, that the coming of Agnes within her own household was being presented in a novel aspect; and the aspect by no means pleased her.

"Really," she said, in constrained tones, "I thought that you wanted to come."

"Wanted to come!" echoed Agnes, utterly forgetful of everything save her own self-reproach. "It almost broke my heart to leave them. I have been homesick ever since; for they were my home! Aunt Louisa, Uncle

Robert, and Marianna — they were all that I had in the world to love. And they were so fond of me! It cost them such suffering to give me up! Oh, I see my folly now — when it is too late!"

The last words ended in passionate sobbing. But Mrs. Leroy looked utterly untouched. She might have pitied the grief beside her if it had not stung her pride; and with this woman pride was the soonest stung because easiest reached; it ensheathed her character as the husk ensheathes the ear.

She sat perfectly silent, watching Agnes's tears till their paroxysmal force had partially subsided. A little afterward Rivington reëntered the room. He had an air of ruffled majesty; he had probably been in a hurry for one of the very few times during his elegant, inert life.

"There is no quicker way for you to go," he said, addressing Agnes, "than by starting to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. I have

made full inquiries, and I find that you will gain no time by leaving earlier, on account of the non-connection between trains."

A new idea suddenly struck Agnes. "But I must telegraph back to them," she said, brokenly. She hurried toward her writing-table, took paper and a pencil, and began to scrawl a message, with shaking hand. The message ran thus:—

"*I will start as soon as possible. God bless all of you!* AGNES."

She hastily rose, holding the scrap of paper on which these words were written; she was the picture of misery and perplexity. "You will have this sent for me, will you not?" she appealed to Mrs. Leroy.

Rivington was abruptly heard, at this point, addressing a servant who stood in the open doorway. But Agnes immediately turned, and perhaps her eyes were quicker than his. She saw that the servant held an envelope. "Is it for me?" she cried. And then, as the girl ex-

tended her hand toward Agnes, the latter quickly recoiled, as though in terrified foreboding.

A bitter moan left her lips. "Oh, she is dead — I know it! Aunt Louisa is dead!" swept piteously through the room.

Rivington took the envelope. He at once saw that it was another telegram. "Let me open it," he said to Agnes, who stood watching him with parted lips.

She moved her head, in speechless acquiescence. Rivington understood her; a moment afterward he was running his eye over the new message. "Ah," he exclaimed, "good news!"

A light seemed to flash across the face of Agnes. She sprang to Rivington's side; he held the paper for her while she read these words: —

"*Your aunt is much better. The danger is passed. Marianna will write very soon. Do not come, and forgive us for alarming you.*

ROBERT CLIFFE."

Agnes burst into tears once more, while Rivington handed the message to his sister. The next instant she laughed with hysterical sharpness, throwing up her hands like an exultant child, while the tears were still streaming from her eyes. Mrs. Leroy and Rivington exchanged glances.

"I shall see my dear aunt again!" she now cried, with the strange pathos of mingled grief and joy. "I have not been so severely punished, after all! Oh, thank Heaven that she has been spared! If she had died I — I should never have forgiven myself. But what am I saying? Die? No, no, she is better; perhaps she has not been so very ill, after all. Uncle Robert is absurdly fond of her; he grew frightened and sent for me. Yes — yes, it was only that! Oh, I am so happy — so very happy!"

"My dear Agnes, you must try to compose yourself," said Mrs. Leroy.

But more than an hour passed before Ag-

nes regained her composure. By this time dinner was served, but she dined, at Mrs. Leroy's suggestion, within her own apartment. Shortly afterward she began a long letter to the Cliffes. It was a letter full of passionate love; and it contained a certain resolve openly stated.

Just as Agnes had finished sealing and directing it, Mrs. Leroy made her appearance. "You are better, my dear?" she asked.

"Oh, I am quite well," answered Agnes. "You have seen my first case of hysteria," she added, smiling. "I hope it will be my last."

"You had a severe shock," said Mrs. Leroy. "There was every reason why it should affect your nerves." After a little pause she went on: "Your friend, Mr. Speed, has called to see you. Shall you be able to receive him?"

"Yes," said Agnes, promptly rising. "Can I ask you to let one of the servants post this as soon as possible?" she continued, giving

Mrs. Leroy the letter which she had just written.

She found Mr. Speed alone in the drawing-room. His visit, at such an hour, was intensely welcome to her. She unconsciously pressed his hand for an instant. "Oh, Mr. Speed," she began, "I have something most important to tell you. It begins sadly, but it ends hopefully." And then she narrated the story of the two telegrams.

"So now your fears are quieted, of course," said Mr. Speed when she had finished.

"No, indeed," said Agnes; "how is that possible? You can't think what anxiety I still feel. I so long to end it — to join them there in the West, for good and all!"

"For good and all!" . . . Mr. Speed repeated the words in a dismayed monotone. Agnes had not noticed till then that his face was leaner and deeper-lined beneath its large over-jutting forehead, where the heavy black hair hung loose and straight. The dark fixity of his look now embarrassed her.

"Yes," she said, gravely, "I have made up my mind to go. To-day has decided me. I shall leave the day after to-morrow. I" . . .

The next words faltered on Agnes's lips. She saw that the man beside her was greatly agitated. She could not fail to understand why. He was making the truth too nakedly plain.

Mr. Speed slowly rose. He came very close to Agnes; he stretched out both hands toward her; his face wore an immense solemnity. "Will you not stay?" he said. "Will you not stay and be my wife?"

Agnes flushed crimson, dropping her eyes for a moment. "I cannot," she murmured, very faintly.

"I love you," he said. "I shall never care for any woman but you. It has been this way almost since the first hour that we met. It will be this way always. Will you not think it over? Will you not let me go now, and see you at some other time, when you have re-

flected, deliberated? I am not so poor; my outlook is growing better as time passes. I will work for you, and treasure you beyond price. You know my aims, my hopes — we have talked together so often. Will you not share these? Do not answer with haste. I shall not press you for an answer. I will come again."

"I would let you come again," said Agnes, "if it could profit either of us." She was perfectly calm now; the flush had quite faded from her face, though her eyes sparkled unwontedly. "But I cannot marry you, Mr. Speed. I honor you, but I cannot be your wife."

"You have no love for me?" His question rang with the solemnity of anguish.

"No," said Agnes, using the cruelty of inevitable candor, "I do not love you."

Mr. Speed held out his hand — the big hand in the brown glove. "Good-by," he said. "Good-by, and God bless you!"

Agnes gave him her own hand, rising. "Oh, Mr. Speed," she whispered, "I am so sorry!"

He turned and left the room without another word.





XII.

AGNES went to her room a little while after Mr. Speed's departure. It was still early in the evening. She seated herself before her writing-table and leaned her head upon her hand, thinking. At length she began to write; her pen hurried over the paper with swift impetuosity; she was composing a letter to Mr. Speed.

She poured into her letter the warm fullness of a devout friendship. She wrote with tender eloquence and unmistakable sorrow. She expressed the most heartfelt wishes for his future happiness and success. She blamed herself that she should have been subjected, however transiently, to the misfortune of clouding so earnest, rare, and capable a life.

She declared her sincere hope that they should meet again at some day when his present trouble had passed, as she was confident that it would pass, and when the intimacy from which she had reaped so many precious results might be renewed amid circumstances of a clearer mutual understanding.

After she had finished writing her letter, she read it through. After she had finished reading it, she tore it into fragments.

"Of what use could it be?" she thought. "It could only freshen his sufferings. Let him think me cruel, if he must; that may help to heal his wound the quicker."

Shortly afterward a knock sounded at the closed door, and Agnes rose to admit Mrs. Leroy.

"So Mr. Speed has gone?" said her cousin. "I had no idea of it; I supposed that you were with him in the drawing-room. He made a very short visit."

"Yes," said Agnes.

Mrs. Leroy seated herself, and Agnes did the same. The former was robed in one of Madame Fourbellini's most triumphant efforts; this artist might have told you that it was meant to express the dawn of resignation in a bereaved spirit; its only touches of color were sombre purple, and these had been veiled under dark films of tulle, while a single spray of purple nestled amid the wearer's blond tresses.

"My dear Agnes," said Mrs. Leroy, in smooth semitone, "I wonder if you will feel offended at a little proposition of mine. It concerns your friend, Mr. Speed. Frankly, do you not find him a trifle tiresome?"

"I have never found him so," said Agnes, while a sort of tingling indignation seemed to creep through her veins.

"But, my dear," resumed Mrs. Leroy, putting her graceful head a little on one side, and lowering her eyelids till their droop well

contrasted with the slight, cold smile that she wore, "you must have observed that this Mr. Speed is curiously different from the people by whom you are at present surrounded."

"Oh, I have observed that," said Agnes. "Excuse me, cousin Augusta," she went on, after a momentary silence, "but have you not forgotten the proposition of which you just spoke? I should like to hear it."

"Oh, you quite frighten me out of making it," said Mrs. Leroy, with a short, frigid laugh. "I am afraid that I have put my head into a hornets'-nest, really! You are so evidently prepared to do battle for your friend, that I suppose you will think both him and yourself quite insulted if I suggest that his further visits upon you are . . . unadvisable."

It was Agnes's turn to laugh. "I should make a very poor champion for Mr. Speed," she said, "and I don't think that he stands

in much need of my defense. For myself, I am very far from feeling insulted; but no doubt Mr. Speed would have the right to feel so if I told him that you wished me to forbid him your house."

"Oh, of course," said Mrs. Leroy, the smile dying from her lips, and her slim, supple figure straightening itself. "I never authorize impertinences, and it is not the best taste in you, my dear, to imply that I would."

Agnes shook her head in satirical puzzlement. "Pardon me," she answered, "if I am obtuse enough to have misunderstood *that*, cousin Augusta."

Mrs. Leroy had turned pale. "Oh, your dullness of perception is your own affair," she said, with heightened voice. "Upon my word, I did not imagine that you were devotedly attached to Mr. Speed."

"I respect him very much," replied Agnes, tranquilly. "His intellect and character command my respect."

"It is a pity that one cannot say the same for his manners."

"*I* can," returned Agnes, quickly.

"You are easy to please," declared Mrs. Leroy, with crisp irony. "We must have very different definitions of the word 'gentleman.' You don't use the same dictionary that I use; that is evident."

"No," said Agnes, dryly, "I do not. Yours is a pocket-dictionary, cousin Augusta, with a gilt clasp, and not much heavier than your fan or gloves. Mine is altogether a larger volume; it goes into derivations."

Mrs. Leroy grew paler yet. She felt very angry, but she was, as we know, what is called a discreet woman; she knew when she had found too strong an adversary. Besides, she had of late grown to like Agnes, though she did not understand her. It was a narrow nature trying to comprehend a spacious one, yet the narrow nature had occasional vague perceptions of its neighbor's

finer breadths. In a certain sense, too, she had grown proud of Agnes. The girl had some peculiarities that baffled and perplexed her, but altogether she had made Mrs. Leroy's present course of duteous protection a very agreeable pastime.

And so it happened that the next words which this lady spoke were mild enough to be called conciliatory. "Come, Agnes," she said, "there is no necessity for us to quarrel over Mr. Speed. If you like him, I don't. If you want him to come here, I don't. I can't see how you can like him and yet care for such men as Oscar Schuyler, or Livvy Maxwell, or even Mr. Gascoigne. Still, I have said my last word on the subject. Do precisely as you please."

Agnes sat quite still for a moment, with lowered eyes. Then she rose, came slowly near to Mrs. Leroy, and stood beside her. "Cousin Augusta," she said, "we have both of us spoken almost the last that need be

spoken either on this or on any subject. It is best that I should tell you the truth at once. I have made up my mind to join the Cliffes on Thursday."

"Join the Cliffes, Agnes? You mean?" . . .

"I mean to live always with them — not to leave them again."

Mrs. Leroy rose like one in a stupor. She put her hand upon her forehead; she scanned Agnes's face with incredulous eyes. "You can't possibly mean this!" she murmured.

"It was in the letter that I gave you to-night," said Agnes, resolutely. "It is settled. I could not help it. I cannot live away from them. I am going home."

These quiet sentences were like so many convulsive explosions to Mrs. Leroy's astonished mind. If she had put a purse of gold pieces in the hands of some beggar, and had them politely returned, she could not have been more racked with consternation. She had never dreamed of this contingency. That Ag-

nes should feel the strangeness of her altered life was possible enough ; that she should sometimes find its novelty uncongenial was also supposable. But that she should calmly renounce its superabundant advantages, after once having experienced them, was beyond conception. To Mrs. Leroy, in that immensity of self-satisfaction with which she had for years surveyed her social surroundings, it seemed that fate had enviably lifted her above a vast aspiring throng. With an absurd miscalculation, she overestimated the number of those who jealously viewed her prosperity. During her girlhood she had been courted ; during the brilliant sovereignty of her married days she had constantly known what it was to have her countenance and favor sought with zeal by those who believed it precious. She had always been a great lady in her way, but she made the mistake that, because a few limited hundreds flocked about her with admiring homage, an unseen majority of thousands

longed to show her equal allegiance. The multiformity of human ambition was a fact that did not enter her consciousness. She had a pleasant, half-formed conviction that nearly everybody desired a place in her visiting-book.

"If you commit this folly," she now said to Agnes, with husky, trembling tones, "you will regret it through the rest of your life."

Agnes scarcely knew what answer to make. The change in her cousin startled her extremely. Mrs. Leroy had grown livid to the very lips. She appeared overwhelmed, thunderstruck.

"If I should regret it," Agnes presently replied, "the fault will be all my own. And I hope that you will believe me sensible of your kindness, cousin Augusta — and grateful for it as well."

"Grateful!" almost gasped Mrs. Leroy. "I have never known more rank ingratitude. And you think that you can afford to throw away opportunities after this insane fashion?

When I have introduced you among the best people — given you the chance to *lancer* yourself by a distinguished marriage, you suddenly tell me that you prefer being nobody and living among nobodies. Oh, it is preposterous!"

"My aunt and uncle are very far from nobodies," said Agnes. She felt indestructibly placid; her cousin's wrath seemed born of a pitiable arrogance, and she now watched it with a certain species of compassion. "It is much better," she went on, "for me to tell you that I am not happy here — partly because I long for my dear relatives' company, and partly because of other reasons."

"May I ask what other reasons?" said Mrs. Leroy, throwing back her head in haughty indignation.

Agnes mused for a moment. "Yes," she then said, "since I grant that you have the right to ask me. Well, cousin Augusta, I am not fitted for the life that now surrounds me."

"I thought you were not, at first," harshly interrupted Mrs. Leroy, "but of late you have grown much better suited to it."

"Thanks," said Agnes, with a smile; "I have not observed the improvement myself; it seems to me that I am very much the same sort of person as when I first came to Lafayette Place. . . . However, you somewhat misunderstand my meaning. It is not a question of how I please your friends, since you force me to speak plainly, but of how they please me."

"Indeed!"

"Candidly, yes." Agnes now seated herself close to Mrs. Leroy. "Cousin Augusta," she proceeded, "I did not expect to find either you or your friends just what I have found them. If this makes you angry, pray listen to me a little further before you accuse me of an impertinence. I am too sincerely anxious that you shall know my exact feelings, for any thought of impertinence to enter my

mind. I desire that the motives of my departure may be known to you in full. And though you may afterward greatly condemn the course I am taking, you must at least allow that I have been guilty of no false dealings."

Mrs. Leroy's face was concealing a sarcastic sneer, though rather ill. "You should not be surprised," she said, with haughty curtness, "if I expressed indifference as to precisely how my friends have failed in gaining your approval."

"Oh, I am very well aware," returned Agnes, "that you must look upon me as grossly presumptuous. But I cannot help that; I want you to understand just why I am going. It 's half because you and those about you belong to another world from mine. Yours is a world that laughs and enjoys itself a great deal, that reads little, thinks little, and is very careless of to-morrow. It is an exceedingly dainty world, with no sympathies for what lies

beyond its limits, no interests that do not concern its present amusements. It sets large store by its exclusive selectness; it is elegant, patrician, high-bred. I like much of it from an outward point of view, but there is much that from an inward point of view wearies and disheartens me. I want less repression, more genuineness, warmer impulse, wider intellectual reach. I cannot find it here; I can find nothing here that feeds what early education has taught me to believe my better longings. All this may seem vague to you, but perhaps if I spoke further I should fail to make it clearer. . . . I hope you will understand me, but even if you do not, I hope that we shall still part friends."

Mrs. Leroy turned away as Agnes ended. She walked to the door, and paused there for a moment. Her face was still full of supercilious anger.

"You will live to repent all this high-flown sentiment," she murmured, under her breath.

"When that repentance comes, you will properly value what you have lost." Immediately afterward she glided from the room.

Agnes sank into a chair. A subtle smile had touched her lips. "Oh, my cousin," she thought, "if you could only see yourself for an instant as I see you now!"



XIII.

SCHUYLER went home, that same afternoon, in a very disturbed condition. Agnes's gently earnest voice, broken by sweet throbs of feeling, haunted him through subsequent hours; her womanly face, too, with its virginal, unworldly gaze, lived like a picture in his memory. At times he strove to shake off the influence; at times he courted its delicate yet cogent spell. Dining alone at his club, that evening, he avoided all associates from then till midnight, and passed the interval in unaccustomed solitude. That night he slept very ill, and on the following morning he called upon Meta Schuyler.

She was not at home. He spent the rest of the day quite aimlessly, as usual. That

evening he went to a great state-dinner at a certain Mrs. Abernethy Smith's. The dinner was to be succeeded by a ball, whose possible splendors had been diligently discussed among polite circles through the previous fortnight.

Mrs. Abernethy Smith was the wife of a wealthy Wall Street broker, who had shot into recent celebrity by his bold financial enterprises. He belonged to that class of successful "operators" who direct the resources of sudden millions towards attaining social eminence. He was a slender little man, with nervous dark eyes, meagre conversation, and a feverish abruptness of movement. He had come into the "street" a few years ago from an obscure Eastern town, and had rapidly made himself felt as an unusual power amid the combative ferments of speculation. He spent his money with princely largess, and he had a handsome, bustling wife who assisted him in doing so. For one year Mr. and Mrs Abernethy Smith struggled to make aristoc-

racy recognize them. At the end of the year their victory had been complete; their irresistible dinners had conquered. Not long ago one of Oscar Schuyler's friends had said to him: "So Abernethy Smith has made society swallow him, after all."

"Yes," drawled Schuyler, cruelly, "and why not? Think of the wines he gives them to wash him down with."

Schuyler appeared a little late, this evening, in the Smiths' drawing-room. A large company had already assembled there. The apartments were one dazzling opulence of ornamentation. The walls were hidden with paintings of immense value; a Meissonier, worth its weight in gold a number of times over, was wedged inconspicuously between a famous Gérome and an unrivaled Daubigny. Costly cabinets, Oriental rugs, incomparable china, were crowded together in what seemed at first one sumptuous confusion, but afterwards revealed dexterous tact of arrangement.

Beyond, through half-drawn draperies, you saw the lustrous waxed floor of a princely ball-room, with prismatic chandeliers glittering among environments of rose-color and silver.

"You are to take in Miss Meta Schuyler," said Mrs. Abernethy Smith to her recently-arrived guest, who barely concealed a start when he heard this decree.

"Thanks," he said, with a mechanical bow and smile. "Will you please tell me where I am to find her?" he added, looking around.

"She is talking with Mr. Gascoigne," replied his hostess, "near one of the front windows." And then Mrs. Abernethy Smith turned away to receive her last dinner-guest, a certain powerful queen of one fashionable clique, who had rather alarmed her by not appearing sooner. Mrs. Smith's dress was pale-green velvet, and so stiffly crusted over with masses of green embroidery that its heavy grandeurs retarded her motions.

Mr. Gascoigne, who stood at the edge of the sofa where Meta Schuyler was seated, watched this emerald lady from afar. "How magnificently Mrs. Smith is got up!" he whispered to Meta, leaning down. "She can hardly walk, though. She looks like a wounded katydid."

"Say butterfly," murmured Meta. "The Smiths have left their chrysalis state, you know."

Schuyler came up, at this point, and shook hands with Meta and Mr. Gascoigne. Shortly afterward everybody went into the dining-room. Here gleamed a long table, literally banked with flowers, one superb bower of bloom rising from its midst. As the guests took their seats, charming music began to sound from the near hall. "It is like fairy-land," said Meta to Schuyler, who was seated at her side; "is it not?"

"I hope fairy land was a nicer place," said Schuyler.

"Oh, you are in one of your bored moods."

"*You* think I am always that."

"Well, yes, you have been bored for a good many years."

"I was not bored when you first met me."

"That is a long time ago."

"I remember it very well," said Schuyler, sipping a glass of golden wine. "Do you remember it?"

"Perfectly," answered Meta. "I had lately come from abroad, with Aunt Lydia. It was my birthday; I was just sixteen; there was a small party given in my honor. I recollect how furious you made me, by coming up to where I sat flirting with some boyish intimate, claiming cousinship, and asking me whether I had on my first long dress. It was true that I had, and this was what made me so angry."

"And you have been angry ever since, more or less."

Meta started. "What do you mean?" she said, creasing her brows.

"Oh, I mean that you have never quite taken me into your good graces. Of course there have been interregnums in your displeasure, but on the whole they have been brief ones."

Meta answered in a low voice, looking down. "We have had some serious talks," she said. The babble of fellow-convivialists rose all about them, sounding above the voluptuous music, through the heavy-odored air.

"Yes," said Schuyler, in swift, peculiar tones, "and neither of us has been much the better for them; have we?"

The color stole into Meta's face. She was still looking down. "No," she said, "I suppose not."

A silence followed. "I should like to have one more serious talk," Schuyler at length declared. "But perhaps this is n't just the place for it. . . . I don't know, however. . . What do you say?"

Meta lifted her eyes and looked at him quite fixedly. "Are you in earnest?" she asked.

"Thoroughly."

"On what subject is our serious talk to be?"

"That remains untold. I must first find out whether your frame of mind is properly receptive."

"To your advice?" asked Meta, with a little rebellious curl of the lip.

"No, to my treaty of peace. I should like to propose one . . . a very permanent one, this time — not the sort of patched-up armistice that you and I have repeatedly tried for. And I am not so sure, either, that the time and place are very unfavorable. I don't think the empty folly of the life that you and I are both leading was ever better shown than just now. Where could we find a hollower burlesque on hospitality than we find at this moment? where a more florid advertisement of

ambitious pretension? But I shan't preach, though the text is tempting. I have no right to do so." Schuyler lowered his voice, here, and leaned his head close toward Meta's. "You know that — perhaps you know it better than I" . . .

The dinner was a marvel of luxury. Its numberless courses lasted till a late hour, and then the ball began, on a scale of equal splendor. Mrs. Leroy and Agnes entered the rooms at about eleven o'clock. Livingston Maxwell saw the latter from a distance and at once glided up to her.

"You are late," he said. "You are getting into bad habits."

"I did not expect to come at all," answered Agnes. "But I changed my mind, afterward, as you see. I had a purpose in coming."

"Can I ask what it was?"

"There were a few people to whom I wished to say good-by."

"Good-by!" repeated Maxwell, opening his

genial eyes very wide. "Where on earth are you going?"

Agnes told him, in a few direct words. He looked amazed and shocked when she had finished. "I can't believe it!" he faltered. "Ah, I see; we have disappointed you; I remember your own words to me the first day that we met."

"Everybody has not disappointed me," said Agnes, pointedly, as their eyes met in one steady look.

"Ah," said Maxwell, "you don't know how disappointed *I* am!"

"But it will not last very long; you take matters so easily."

"That is unkind. You mean that there is no depth about me."

"Far from it!" contradicted Agnes earnestly; "I mean that you are the sworn enemy of everything unpleasant. Remember, you once explained your individuality to me. I shall never forget how the photograph pleased

me ; it was a real sun-picture. If all the people whom I have met had been as happy a discovery to me as you were, I would . . . Well," broke off Agnes, laughing, "never mind what I would have done."

"Tell me," said Maxwell, in an odd voice. "I want very much to know."

"Well, then, I will tell you. I would have gone to see my relations in the West, but afterwards I would have returned."

"Then I am not strong enough, by myself," said Maxwell, meaningly, "to induce your return ?"

Agnes laughed again. "One swallow does not make a summer."

"It might try," said Maxwell. "Give it a chance."

There was a trouble and a tremor in his tones which perhaps the music and the commingled voices caused Agnes to miss, and which in reality bore sharp contrast with the lightness of the words themselves.

"I am sure you don't want me to forget you," Agnes now said, "and I assure you that there is no danger of it. You are one of my admirations," she went on, with a frank simplicity that somehow made her hearer inwardly recoil. "I shall have many a chat about you with my aunt, and uncle, and cousin. But I shall always tell them that they can never properly appreciate what a rare, delightful person you are, without having met and known you. And then I shall tell them how good you were to me; they will like you for that, poor dears! Honestly, you have been a friend of friends. You have saved me from at least ten stupid evenings. Upon my word, I sometimes think you have come very near making a belle of me."

Just then two other gentlemen joined Agnes. A moment afterward Livingston Maxwell left her side with considerable suddenness. She caught a glimpse of his face as he turned away; it did not look sunny then,

though Agnes failed to observe that it was gloomy. In reality a distress overspread it which her final glance was too transient to remark. But succeeding circumstances made her recall that some sort of change had been evident, and wonder if anything in the amicable ardor of her last speech could possibly have given offense to this paragon of kind-heartedness.

Perhaps twenty minutes later Schuyler came up to Agnes's side. There was somehow a change in him; she noticed it before he had spoken three words; but she could not decide what it was.

"Your cousin has been telling me of your new resolve," he said.

"Are you surprised?" asked Agnes.

"No. I was prepared for it. But somebody else is very surprised."

"Oh," said Agnes, gathering her brows a little impatiently, "you mean Mrs. Leroy?"

"No; I mean Meta Schuyler. She is not

in the German to-night. She wishes to see you. I know where she is waiting. Will you let me take you to her?"

"Certainly."

Agnes looked searchingly at Schuyler while she accepted his arm. His face remained wholly impassive. They found Meta half hidden in the alcove of a window at the further end of the drawing-room. She rose as Agnes appeared; she clasped Agnes's hand in her own, and held it firmly while she spoke.

"You are really going?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I am so very sorry!"

The two women stood gazing into each other's eyes. Meta's had a rich, starry glimmer, and her cheeks burned like roses.

"You will make my going much happier," murmured Agnes, "if you have good news to tell me."

"Good news?"

Meta repeated the words with a bright,

abrupt smile. The tapestries of the alcove almost entirely shaded them from the general gaze. Schuyler had stationed himself at some little distance apart.

"You know what I mean," said Agnes, answering the smile.

Still holding her hand, Meta leaned close to the ear of Agnes and whispered several sentences. Then Agnes kissed her with a sweet, impetuous fervor; and as she withdrew her lips Meta saw that tears glittered in her eyes.

"At last!" exclaimed Agnes, joyfully, but in a broken voice.

"It is all owing to you!" said Meta. "You brought it about. He confessed that to me."

Agnes turned away. Meta never forgot the lovely look her face wore at this moment. "I must congratulate him," Agnes said, leaving the alcove. . . .

Not long afterward Mrs. Leroy and her cousin met. "I am ready to go now," said the latter, "whenever you are."

"You have made all your farewells?" asked Mrs. Leroy, in a calm voice, and with an inscrutable expression.

"All that it is of any consequence to make," replied Agnes. "Oh, by the way," she added, an instant later, "there is still Mr. Maxwell; I have not yet said good-by to him."

"He is not leading to-night," said Mrs. Leroy, looking toward the brilliant coterie of dancers in the near ball-room. "But I dare say he can be found."

Livingston Maxwell was not to be found, however. Agnes was obliged to leave without again seeing him.



XIV.

IT was the evening of the next day. Agnes had departed that afternoon for the West. Mrs. Leroy was alone in her sitting-room. A novel lay on her lap, but she was not reading it; she was thinking. It was almost time for Rivington to return from the club. A fire sparkled with ruddy vivacity on the silver-grated hearth. The evening was somewhat chilly, and Mrs. Leroy had drawn rather near the fireplace, so that its light sent out little red glints, now and then, from the complex jet trimmings that adorned her costume.

Presently Rivington strolled into the room and seated himself at his sister's side. He

had on his invariable evening-dress, and looked as majestically handsome as usual.

"Well, Rivington," said Mrs. Leroy, with a peculiar smile, "she is gone, is n't she? I can hardly realize it."

Rivington appeared to muse while he prepared a cigarette. "By Jove, neither can I," he at length said. "It 's very extraordinary. People rather took her up, did n't they?"

Mrs. Leroy was staring into the fire. "No, Rivington; she took them up."

"How is that, Augusta?"

"Oh, nothing."

"She was certainly a very nice girl in her way," resumed Rivington, after a pause. "I thought she was going to bother us, at first. You did, too. You looked upon her as a hopeless case."

Mrs. Leroy was still staring into the fire. She shook her head very emphatically, smiling with an almost sardonic bitterness. "Oh, she

was certainly a hopeless case," said Rivington's sister. "I think that still."

"But she got along so finely afterward," continued Rivington, in his rich, well-bred voice. "The idea of throwing away such splendid chances as we gave her! . . . I can't make it out at all. . . . I thought she was rather fond of you, too, Augusta. I" . . .

"Fond of me!" cried Mrs. Leroy, starting up from her seat. "She despised me!"

Rivington now slowly rose. He looked excessively astonished. His sister had begun to pace the room in a restless, impetuous way.

"Upon my word, Augusta," he presently said, "I should think *you* might afford to stand her contempt."

Mrs. Leroy turned suddenly and faced him. She seemed wretchedly overcome. There was more distress than anger in her look. "Oh, Rivington," she cried again, "I am fond of that girl — I can't help it — I miss her already — *I — I loved her!*"

The next moment Mrs. Leroy had thrown herself into a chair and covered her face. She had begun to sob with actual violence. Rivington stood and watched her, utterly bewildered.

END.



University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

LD
URL
FEB 19 1989
MAR 20
APR 20
APR 22 1989


UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
B 000 002 632 8



Univer
Sou
Li